Cultural Connections

Volume III | 2018

A Special Issue to Commemorate Singapore's Chairmanship of ASEAN 2018

About the Culture Academy Singapore

The Culture Academy Singapore was established in 2015 by the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth to groom the next generation of cultural leaders in the public sector. Guided by its vision to be a centre of excellence for the development of culture professionals and administrators, the Culture Academy Singapore's work spans three areas: Education and Capability Development, Research and Scholarship and Thought Leadership.

The Culture Academy Singapore also provides professional development workshops, public lectures and publishes research articles through its journal, *Cultural Connections*, to nurture thought leaders in Singapore's cultural scene.

One of the Academy's popular offerings is its annual thought leadership conference which provides a common space for cultural leaders to gather and exchange ideas and best practices, and to incubate new ideas. It also offers networking opportunities and platforms for collaborative ideas-sharing.

Cultural Connections is a journal published annually by the Culture Academy Singapore to nurture thought leadership in cultural work in the public sector.

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Editor-in-Chief: Thangamma Karthigesu
Editor: Tan Chui Hua
Editorial Assistants: Tan Jia Ying & Genevieve Lim
Design: Fable
Printer: Grenadier
Distributed by the Culture Academy Singapore
Published in June 2018 by Culture Academy Singapore,
61 Stamford Road #02-08 Stamford Court Singapore 178892

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ISBN 24249122

Supported By:

Cultural Connections

Volume III
2018

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Foreword

Cultural Connections was first published by the Culture Academy Singapore in 2016 to provide a platform for arts and culture administrators, and professionals within Singapore's public sector to publish their research in their respective fields, as well as to share best practices with their colleagues.

Over the past three years, this annual publication has widened its reach to include essays contributed by academics, diplomats and our counterparts from overseas. This has contributed to the sharing of knowledge within Singapore and around our Southeast Asian region. Over time, the Culture Academy Singapore seeks to expand these efforts in presenting an exciting and fast-growing region where we can collectively nurture an ASEAN identity that will showcase the many opportunities that the region has to offer one another and to the world at large.

In commemoration of Singapore's Chairmanship of ASEAN this year, this third issue of *Cultural Connections* explores the historical and cultural links that have brought the 10 nations of ASEAN together. The rich heritage of ASEAN is described through selected star pieces from the National Collection of Singapore.

Through an exchange of cultural knowledge, expertise and skills, we can foster deeper appreciation of the great diversity in this region of ancient civilisations and contemporary artistic expressions. Our shared heritage as Southeast Asian nations brings us together while we celebrate our distinctive identities and cultures.

I hope you enjoy reading these fascinating aspects of ASEAN in this issue of *Cultural Connections*.

Rosa Daniel (Mrs)
Deputy Secretary (Culture)
Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth

Editor-in-Chief's Note

It has been 51 years since the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was formed on 8 August 1967. From the five founding member-organisation in 1967, it has since grown to ten. ASEAN has also become a strong regional body that many nations want to do business and engage in cultural exchanges with, and even have their citizens visit, work and live in.

On the occasion of Singapore's Chairmanship of ASEAN in 2018, this third volume of *Cultural Connections* is dedicated to everything ASEAN from the arts and cultural front.

The essays are published in two sections – the first features essays on how Singapore's arts and culture scene has been influenced by Southeast Asia and vice versa, and highlights the long and deep, people-to-people, country-to-country, and organisation-to-organisation relations Singapore has enjoyed with her regional neighbours. The second part is a collection of essays written by our curators from the arts and culture sector using an artefact from their respective Southeast Asian collection to showcase an aspect of each of our fellow member nations from ASEAN. From stamps to textiles, to sculptures and artworks, we hope to showcase the rich artistic tradition of ASEAN and the commonalities we share. We have used pieces from Singapore's national collection to explore and celebrate the uniqueness, beauty and richness of Southeast Asia, from historical and trade links to culture, heritage, and economic and political ties.

We hope that you will enjoy savouring every essay in this volume as much as we have enjoyed putting it together.

Thangamma Karthigesu (Ms)
Director, Culture Academy Singapore
Editor-in-Chief

ASEAN Arts and Culture: The Role of Singapore

Ambassador Ong Keng Yong

Executive Deputy Chairman,
S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies,
Nanyang Technological University

The development and opening of The Esplanade in the year 2002, with its world-class concert hall and theatre, was a game-changer in the promotion of arts and culture in Singapore. The Esplanade accelerated the government masterplan to develop human resources and audiences, and to introduce innovations and new technologies into arts and culture. It catapulted Singapore into the top league of arts and culture physical infrastructure, and attracted rave and pejorative reviews from various quarters including certain ASEAN circles. One discomfort is the perceived "control" of arts and culture by the government. There is also the so-called "mercenary" approach of the authorities in developing arts and culture.

In 2012, the government further galvanised Singapore's arts scene by announcing that it would be spending S$274 million over five years to develop arts and culture in Singapore. Within the year, the Nanyang Technological University Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore was launched in Gillman Barracks as a national research centre. The centre was set up with the aim of positioning Singapore as a hub for critical dialogue and creative thinking about curating in Southeast Asia.

2015 was earmarked as a milestone year for Singapore's arts and culture scene, with the opening of the National Gallery Singapore. The government also invested in revamping three major cultural institutions in the country: the Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore Art Museum and National Museum of Singapore. Many arts-related activities were also organised in commemoration of Singapore's 50th anniversary of independence in 2015. However, there are some Singaporeans who worry about the long-term viability of the costly National Gallery while some Southeast Asians feel Singapore is "mining their culture" as the city state is said to have "limited own artistic heritage".

The fact is Singapore has long been the business, finance and transportation centre of the region. Geography plays a big part in this accomplishment and history also contributes substantially to the growth of Singapore's hub status. For example, Singapore was the place to be for Malay journal printing and Malay movie production after the Second World War. The efficiency of public administration in the city-state and its relative political stability have long fostered a state of mind to locate body and value in Singapore. The art and cultural festivities in 2015 and the momentum carried forward from that also reinforced Singapore as the 'cosmopolitan gateway between the East and the West' (Adam, 2015). Of course, much of this was possible due to Singapore's good economic position globally. It has helped establish the city-state as a cultural destination and an authority on Southeast Asian artistry.

In his speech at the opening of the Singapore Chinese Cultural Centre in Shenton Way in 2017, Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong highlighted the uniqueness of Singapore and how it has helped Singaporeans develop arts and culture. Over time, the different ethnic communities in Singapore, while retaining the uniqueness of their respective cultural traditions, have also influenced the customs and heritage of one another. He highlighted that, "The result has been distinctive Singaporean variants of Chinese, Malay, Indian and Eurasian cultures, and a growing Singaporean identity that we all share, suffusing and linking up our distinct individual identities and ethnic cultures" (Salleh, 2017). Prime Minister Lee has aptly described the outlook of the country's arts and culture scene: to blend in the arts and culture that Singaporeans are exposed to, and form Singapore's own unique creation. As such, Singapore has created various unique art forms to showcase to the rest of the world and at the same time, attracted artists both from the region and the rest of the world.

ASEAN neighbours have not always affirmed Singapore's ways of modernising or adapting various art forms that have originated from cultures around the region. Though the intent of Singapore is to create something distinctive out of the patchwork of diverse cultures existing within Southeast Asia, and to also provide a platform for artists in the region to present their talent to international audiences, it has been perceived differently by some quarters in the region. They are of the view that their traditional ways should remain pure and be passed down through generations. They see fusion in their arts as something that has tainted their heritage. There is also unhappiness with what they claim to be the lure of the "glitzy" and the "techie" in Singapore.

It is important to recognise these different views on arts and culture in the region and find new ways in which they could be presented to the rest of the world, both in their traditional forms and those that are blended with other cultures and innovative characteristics. Moreover, the goal is to show the world the various art forms that exist in this region and for the arts and culture sector to flourish in ASEAN. Younger artists and the more educated performing and visual artistic talents from ASEAN come to Singapore to seek breakthroughs and technologies to advance their respective careers. Successful talents have returned to their home countries to develop indigenous arts and culture, and to encourage compatriots to go to Singapore and further afield from there.

ASEAN is a significant platform to display arts and culture of Southeast Asia for various reasons, the strongest being that it represents all the countries in the region. This would mean that ASEAN can be accountable and also take credit for the different forms of arts and cultural performances that are produced in Singapore. In other words, the arts and culture sector needs to be "ASEAN-ised" to maximise its vast potential for the benefit of the whole region. Singapore is a convenient and suitable conduit. It can continue to play an integral role in this respect. Firstly, because Singapore has spent the last 15 years systematically building the infrastructure and resources to open up and sustain the arts and culture sector in Singapore. This has also involved developing talents in and for the region, and giving them a stage to showcase their skills. Furthermore, Singapore is the Chairman of ASEAN in 2018, thus giving it an opportunity to raise the arts and culture profile of the region in the wider global context.

Being involved in pushing arts and culture is not a completely new notion within ASEAN. There has been a variety of ideas already introduced in and through the regional body to promote culture, heritage and the arts in the region. The arts and culture sector in ASEAN is being overseen by the ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Culture and Arts (AMCA). This team of leaders is responsible for fostering arts and culture to help realise the ASEAN Community. They are guided by the 2016-2025 ASEAN Strategic Plan for Culture and Arts, which seeks to strengthen the cultural identity within ASEAN and facilitate dialogue amongst the various cultures in the region by engaging all the stakeholders. The plan also aims to build enthusiasm and appreciation for histories, cultures, arts, traditions and values of the ASEAN region. It will help build a sense of ownership, importance and unity in the ASEAN Community, encouraging people to pay more attention to preserving, conserving and innovating art forms. All these will create livelihoods from arts and culture and contribute to improving the socio-economic status of the Community.

The ASEAN City of Culture and the Best of ASEAN Performing Arts Series are two useful

initiatives that have helped cultivate an ASEAN identity (Association of Southeast Asian Nations, 2018). The ASEAN City of Culture initiative requires ASEAN member states to take turns to hold activities over a period of two years each time to display and promote their respective art forms and cultural heritage. It was designed to raise the arts and cultural profile as well as the creativity of each ASEAN member state while advancing the ASEAN image as a whole internationally. The Best of ASEAN Performing Arts Series is a performance concert showcasing the talents from each of the ASEAN member states.

Beyond AMCA, there is the ASEAN Foundation based in Jakarta which also has an Arts and Culture programme of its own. This programme covers the performing, visual and fine arts, and involves music and singing, photography, crafts, dancing and other creative activities. The programme aims to protect, celebrate and build an ASEAN Community identity and to foster unity among the peoples of ASEAN. The foundation's ASEAN Puppets Exchange helps to raise awareness on traditional art forms in ASEAN by showcasing the art of traditional puppetry. The exchange serves to elevate the skills and innovation of ASEAN's puppeteers so that the art form can remain sustainable in the long run (ASEAN Foundation, 2018).

Despite implementing such activities and initiatives, ASEAN cooperation in arts and culture is described by critics as insufficient and patchy. They offer various reasons for this. First, countries in the region tend to be overly sensitive about the origin of a particular art form or cultural expression. Instead of openly sharing traditions and heritage elements so that all could learn and improve from one another, several ASEAN member states have allowed "gatekeepers" to establish ownership of specific art forms perceived as originating from their own countries. While they are willing to organise joint performances to showcase their talents, there are often nativist sentiments leading to strong protectionist tendencies. Occasionally, there have been outbreaks of public protest and violence as a result of both sides claiming ownership of art forms.

Governments in the region are also primarily focusing on economic cooperation through ASEAN than engaging in socio-cultural cooperation. Most cultural exchanges are done bureaucratically, with the lack of involvement of working artistes and the younger generation. Many traditional art forms, especially music and dance, are slowly dying off as they are predominantly practised by the older generation with minimal engagement of the youth. As a result, the showcase of arts and culture within the region has stagnated, with ASEAN member states repeatedly sharing the same things with one another and not embracing the changes and practices that have evolved over the years. Contemporary artistic and cultural elements are rarely seriously presented or discussed in a sustainable manner.

Consequently, enterprising and younger artistic talents are breaking away and seeking support outside of government. For example, the C-ASEAN Consonant, an original and creative ASEAN traditional group comprising multi-ethnic musicians, with one representative from each ASEAN member state, makes use of music to strengthen the bonds among peoples in the region. The project was initiated to engage the younger generations in ASEAN and to preserve the heritage of the region. Fortunately, C-ASEAN Consonant is backed by a Thai business conglomerate, ThaiBev. More efforts and support from the ASEAN private sector are needed. At the same time, undue competition and rivalry among

cultural practitioners are distracting. Scarce resources should be maximised for the common good of ASEAN.

ASEAN has limited infrastructure and resources in the arts and culture sector. Many of the programmes organised are more focused on raising awareness and meeting political objectives. To develop arts and culture further, there is a need to create unity within the ASEAN arts and culture sector and "bring ASEAN to the world". That is, to introduce these art forms on an international stage and also attract international stakeholders to the region to invest in the sector. Singapore can contribute to the development of arts and culture via ASEAN, especially with all the ASEAN initiatives already implemented or in the various existing plans. As mentioned earlier, Singapore has good physical infrastructure and its "software" is strengthening. Funding artists in the region to train and perform in the international space through ASEAN, and supporting existing initiatives in ASEAN by providing infrastructure and resources that allow art forms and culture to be showcased to mass audiences are two significant ways Singapore can help sustain the region's tangible and intangible heritage. For example, artefacts relating to the culture of ASEAN could be loaned through the governments of member states to be showcased across the region. Singapore could also provide the opportunity for ASEAN member states to display their artefacts in Singapore museums.

Wider-scale cultural exchange programmes could be initiated through ASEAN so that more people are educated about the arts and culture sector, and are open to pursuing the arts across ASEAN. Strengthening the region's arts and culture sector benefits all, including Singapore, as more people across the world are likely to acknowledge the growing arts and culture sector in ASEAN. It will also widen the platform to attract stakeholders from elsewhere in the world to invest in the sector. Such investments will have a salutary effect on ASEAN's broader economic and political development.

Diversity is an essential part of the ASEAN identity, as we are made up of multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural societies. We should harness this strength to develop ourselves together, as one ASEAN Community – "We are only as strong as we are united, as weak as we are divided." ☐

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Kallang Estuary: A 17th Century Port City

Kwa Chong Guan

Senior Fellow, S.Rajaratnam School of International Studies,
Nanyang Technological University

The late Professor Wong Lin Ken (d.1983), a former Raffles Professor of History at the old University of Singapore, once asked his colleagues why none of them had been able to explain the absence of any port in Singapore before Raffles arrived to establish one. Should there not have been a settlement or port in Singapore as a strategic location on the sailing and trading routes connecting the South China Sea and the Bay of Bengal?

This essay attempts to connect the fragmented and disparate evidence which was not available to Prof Wong and his contemporaries then, and reconstruct the story of a thriving port city in the Kallang estuary from the late 16th century to the 17th century.

De Eredia's 1604 Map

One of the earliest maps of the Straits of Singapore (Figure 1) was drawn by the Portuguese-Malayan explorer or *descobridor*, as he is described in the contemporary account, cartographer and mathematician Manoel Godinho de Eredia. This map appeared in his report entitled, *Declaram de Malaca e India Meridional com o Cathay* or *Description of Melaka, Meridonal India and Cathay*, which chronicles his travels in the region at the beginning of the 17th century. It is however unlikely de Eredia visited Singapore, and his map was probably drawn on the basis of information available to him.

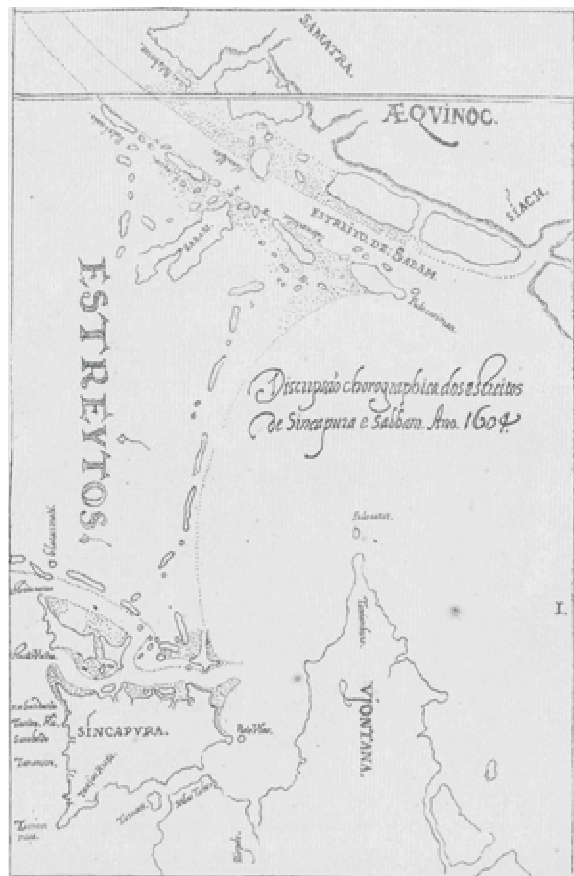

Figure 1. Manoel Godinho de Eredia's early map of the Straits of Singapore, 1604. Image courtesy of National Library Board.

The map, entitled, "Chorographic description of the Straits of Sincapura and Sabban, 1604 A.D," is oriented with Johor at the bottom of the map and Sumatra at the top. The map identifies a number of features on the east coast of "Sincapura" with Tanjong Rusa as the northern-most feature identified, south of which are Tanah Merah, Sungei Bedok, Tanjong Rhu and a "Xabandaria."

Tanjong Rusa refers to Changi Point today, and may have taken its name from the shoals off its coast that were once known as Běting Kusah or Tanion Rusa, as Eredia marked it in his map.

Tanah Merah refers to the red-orange weathered lateritic cliffs along the coast (which have since been levelled). They were a prominent landmark for navigators and pilots up to the 19th century and are marked as "Red Cliffs" in James Horsburg's 1806 chart of "Singapore and Malacca." Later sea charts distinguish between the "Red Cliffs" of Tanah Merah and Bedok. Other early maps of Singapore transcribed this old Malay place name as "Badok" in the vicinity of the "small red cliff."

On the other hand, Tanjong Rhu takes its name from the Malay *ru* or *ěru* or *aru* for the casuarina trees (C. *equisetifolia*, Linn) that grew on its sandy shores. The area was known as "Sandy Point" to the early 19th century British settlers.

The significance of Eredia's map however is in its location of a "xabandaria" in the vicinity of Tanjong Rhu. The former Puisne Judge of the, Straits Settlements, Mr. J. V. Mills, who was one of those colonial officials who were also scholars, translated and edited part of de Eredia's report in 1930. But he failed to note or comment on this reference to "xabandaria" in his extensive comments on de Eredia's report. The last British Director of the old Raffles Museum, the polymath Dr. C. A. Gibson-Hill, in his detailed, but underappreciated study of the charts and maps of the waters around Singapore, also verified de Eredia's four place-names on the east coast of "Sincapura" but also failed to comment on the reference or significance to "xabandaria."

A reference to "xabandaria" is also located on a c.1654 map of the Singapore and Melaka Straits and the Riau Archipelago by Andé Perera dos Reis.

"Xabandaria"

"Xabandaria" is the Portuguese transcription of the Persian "Shabandar," literally, the "Lord of the Haven." In today's more prosaic language, the *shabandar* is a Harbour-Master. The maritime laws of 15th century Melaka, the premier emporium in the Straits of Melaka, states in its opening paragraph that:

> "*every king, must, in the first place, appoint a Chief Minister* (Bendahara), *second, a Police-Chief* (Temenggung), *third, a Treasurer* (Penghulu Bendahari) *and fourthly, a Harbour-master* (Shabandar), *so both the ruler and his subjects can live in peace and security.*"

The Melaka sultans were continuing a centuries-old institution in appointing a *shabandar* to administer trade in their harbour. It is an institution that not only the Melaka sultans, but most other rulers of port cities in Island Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean had also inherited from the Persian traders trading in the Southeast Asian region, as well as China and India from the middle of the first millennium of the current era into the 18th century, and when Persian was a commonly used language of trade and governance.

The Dutch archives records their East India Company traders having to negotiate with these *shabandars* for permission to trade at ports along the coast of Kalimantan, the north coast of Java and in the eastern Indonesian islands.

The early 17th century journals of the Dutch East India Company's Admiral Cornelis Matelieff de Jonge, edited by National University of Singapore historian A/Prof Peter Borschberg, refer to the Admiral meeting the *shabandar* of Singapore, a Seri Raja Negara in the waters of Singapore on 6 May 1606. The *shabandar* claimed to represent the Sultan of Johor who was residing up the Johor River at Batu Sawar.

The memoirs of the Flemish trader Jacques de Coutre, who travelled and traded in the region between 1593 and 1603, also edited by Borschberg, records the trader anchoring in front of this "shabandaria" of Singapore on his travels around the region in 1594. In his memorials to King Philip II of Spain, de Coutre recommends that his Majesty considers building forts on Singapore or *Isla de la Sabandaria Vieja* and "become the lord of this port, which is one of the best that serves the Indies."

As the two maps and textual descriptions we have are imprecise on this issue, the question remains as to whether this *shabandaria* was more likely to have been located along the Singapore River or the Kallang estuary? However, recovery of some fragmentary archaeological evidence in the early 1970s suggests that this thriving "haven" was more likely to be in the Kallang estuary.

Blue and White Porcelains from the Kallang Estuary

In 2008, historian Marcus Langdon discovered 'Sketch of the Land round Singapore' dated 7 February 1819 while researching the history of Pinang. It was drawn by hydrographers who had accompanied Stamford Raffles on his expedition to establish an East India Company settlement at the southern end of the Straits of Melaka. This sketch had been archived in a British Admiralty file, ADM344 and was only discovered after it was finally transferred to the National Archives, Kew, by the Admiralty.

This sketch would be the earliest documentation of Singapore's waterfront, and its significance is that besides the "Village of Singapore" in the Singapore River where Raffles met the Temenggong, there is also marked a "Ryat Village" around what would have been the entrance to the Kallang estuary.

"Ryat" or *ra'yat* as transcribed today, would refer to an aboriginal village, in this instance, a village of sea nomads, possibly the *Orang Biduanda Kallang*, from whom the estuary takes its name. This reference to a "Ryat Village" indicates another centre of activity besides the Singapore River, and may explain why Tengku Hussein, after his recognition as Sultan by Raffles, located his istana near to the mouth of the estuary to control trade into and out of the estuary.

Dredging of the Kallang estuary in the late 1960s for construction of the Benjamin Sheares Bridge brought up, entirely by chance, evidence for 17th century trading in the estuary. The dredge

operator, British Geoffrey Ovens, was sufficiently sharp-eyed to notice unusual objects being dredged up from the river bed. He stopped the dredge and picked up a sack of blue and white porcelain shards from the mud and called the old National Museum to come and check the significance of what he was dredging up. As Ovens recounted to his Singaporean friends, including me, the museum curators he spoke to expressed disinterest in checking what he was finding.

That bag of sherds was distributed among Ovens' Singaporean friends or thrown away. Only nine sherds were kept by one of Ovens' friends, Lee Geok Boi, and I persuaded her to loan them to the Oral History Department and National Archives for an exhibition on "Singapore Before Raffles" in early 1986.

The exhibition was about the deep social memories of the Malay community captured in the oral history interviews conducted by the Oral History Department. I was then heading the Oral History Department and borrowed these nine sherds from Lee to display in the exhibition as supporting evidence for what the Oral History Department interviewees were recollecting of life in the Kallang estuary. These nine sherds (Figure 2), I had argued, could on the basis of the style of their motifs be fairly precisely dated to the era of the Ming dynasty emperor Wanli (1573-1620). Lee has since donated these sherds to the National Museum, where they are exhibited in its gallery on Singapore history.

Figure 2. A sherd discovered at the Kallang estuary. Image courtesy of National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.

Figure 3. Vase dredged up from the Kallang estuary. Image courtesy of National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.

Figure 4. Dish dredged up from the Kallang estuary. Image courtesy of National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.

Geoffrey Ovens took with him on leaving Singapore, a fairly intact pear shaped vase and a large dish he had dredged up, and prized. However, he willed that on his death, these two artefacts be donated to the National Museum (Figures 3 and 4).

These eleven artefacts are now our only evidence that there was trade being conducted in the Kallang estuary in the 17th century. These fragments we have were likely parts of porcelains which cracked or broke during the journey from China and were thrown overboard while the vessel they came in was anchored in the Kallang estuary to take on fresh water and other supplies. The recovery of these Wanli export ware sherds suggests that the 17th century *shabandar's* office was more likely to be in the vicinity of the Kallang estuary than at the mouth of the Singapore River.

Trading Networks of the Shabandaria of Singapore

Sherds similar to the eleven recovered from the Kallang estuary have been found in large quantities around Johor Lama and other sites occupied by the descendants of the Melaka sultans who moved up the Johor River to establish a new sultanate. The Heritage Conservation Centre (Singapore) has within its collections several trays and boxes of underglazed blue porcelain sherds and earthenware fragments collected by staff of the old Raffles Museum from their field surveys of Johor Lama and Kota Tinggi conducted

between 1948 to 1954. Some of these sherds have been dated to the late 15th century, suggesting the existence of a riverine economy on the Johor River which would have attracted the descendants of the Melaka sultans to establish their new base there.

Marine archaeology excavations off the Vietnamese coast and the east coast of Malaysia from the late 1990s onwards have recovered a series of shipwrecks with large cargoes of Chinese and some Vietnamese or Thai porcelains. The documentation by Singapore-based marine archaeologist, Dr Michael Flecker, states that a shipwreck he had excavated in 2001 was that of a Chinese junk dated to 1608 which sank 40 nautical miles east of the fishing port of Phan Thiet in Binh Thuan province, Vietnam. It was destined for Johor with a cargo of "silks and other Chinese goods." Flecker recovered up to 100,000 pieces of Zhangzhou porcelains from the wreck.

The routes, which the junk wrecked off Binh Thuan province and other vessels tracked from the southern Chinese ports to their Southeast Asian destinations, are recorded in rutters such as the *Shunfeng Xiangsong* (Favourable Winds in Escort) and on a remarkable Chinese map found in 2008 in Oxford University's Bodelian Library. The map was acquired by the English jurist and "Orientalist" John Selden, who willed it to the Bodelian Library in 1659.

The 1.5m by 0.96m map is centred on South China Sea and drawn according to early modern European cartographic standards, but uses Chinese landscape painting techniques to outline mountain ranges, rivers and ocean waves, making the map a landscape painting of sorts. But the key feature and significance of the map are the 60 ports it locates and connects by sailing routes from the major Chinese port of Quanzhou, with one principal route going northeast toward Nagasaki and another going southwest towards the Vietnamese port of Hoi An and on to the Malay peninsula.

What is significant about that southwards route is that Johor is its node, where it then further branches out into sub-routes up the Melaka Straits, southwards, along the Sumatran coast to the Sunda Straits and westwards along the north Java coast.

Another sub-route leads northeast towards Kalimantan and on to Manila, while another sub-route reaches out to the eastern Indonesia islands. Historians are still in the early stages of making sense of the map as a depiction of the Fujian or Hokkien maritime trading world during the late Ming period.

Conclusion

The fragmentary cartographic, textual and archaeological evidence colligated in this essay suggests that Singapore in the 16th century was re-emerging from the shadow of Melaka which it was a fiefdom of in the 15th century, to again become a regional emporium.

As in the 14th century, when it was a collection centre for local products from both its peninsula hinterland and island foreland for export to other regional markets, and distribution centre for Chinese and other Asian products to its hinter and forelands, so too in the 16th and 17th centuries, Singapore was emerging again as a regional emporium.

The Johor sultans appointed a *shabandar* on "the long island" or *Pulou Panjang* as the island we know as Singapore was then better known. This

shabandar would administer trade entering the riverine economy they sought to control from their *istana* at Batu Sawar, some 45 kilometres upstream from the mouth of the Johor River. The Dutch had a factory at Batu Sawar as they found it the best location to load pepper and distribute their Indian textiles. The gem trader De Coutre found Batu Sawar a centre of the diamond trade in the region. The *shabandaria* in Singapore would have therefore been the gateway to the Johor River. ☐

This essay is dedicated to the memory of Geoffrey Ovens (c. 1943-2017) who has bequeathed to us the scant evidence of trade in the Kallang estuary in the early 17th century.

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The Art of an ASEAN Consciousness

Dr June Yap

Director (Curatorial, Programmes and Publications),
Singapore Art Museum

What constitutes a regionalist reading of Southeast Asian art?

Today, the act of grouping art and aesthetic practice under a regional rubric appears reasonable, even intuitive. Yet, if asked to sum up Southeast Asian art in a word or a few, an answer might not be as swift and forthcoming.

The present-day configuration of the region of Southeast Asia that the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) represents arose from a specific compact from 1967, forged in Bang Saen, Thailand, even though regional reference has had a longer history in various forms. Contributing to and cementing this alliance were the region's colonial pasts and the effects of the Cold War in the region whence its nations emerged. The goal in the establishment of ASEAN was regional cooperation and stability, predominantly in the spheres of economy and security. That said, homogeneity or uniformity was, and is not the intent. Indeed, one would likely say that the differences and variances from nation to nation are, in fact, productive and generative.

Nevertheless, the formulation of the region, beyond purposes of safety and stability, has deeper roots, such as in shared and related historical and cultural heritage, as well as languages and linguistic foundations. In the course of trade and exchange over centuries, language, custom and belief have been shaped and transformed, through influence, appropriation, adaptation and synthesis. It is such affinities — with the great traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam setting the stage — that are often invoked when it comes to cultural similitude and relation within the region.

The subject of my present reflections upon the region and its history is, however, quite specific – the developments of regional consciousness in the visual arts. Although culture may not have been the primary concern in the constitution of ASEAN, the impact of regionalism on the visual arts may be observed even in its early days, with exhibitions organised under the auspices of ASEAN from the time of its formation: the first in Jakarta in 1968, continuing in Singapore in 1972, in Kuala Lumpur in 1974, and so on. The capacity to organise cultural activity was further enhanced with the setting up of the ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information (ASEAN-COCI) in 1978. But it was not till a decade later that formal discussions focused on the confluence of region and aesthetics.

The "First ASEAN Symposium on Aesthetics" was held in Kuala Lumpur in October 1989 with the theme "Tradition: The Source of Inspiration". Yet, the discussion at this symposium was not focused on traditional aesthetics per se. By the late 1980s, the developments of art in Southeast Asia had moved into what might be deemed early contemporary and contemporary art practices, characterised by a pluralism of forms and experimentation that had extended from the practices and influences of modernism and international movements. Rather than foreground, traditional aesthetics served as "cultural backbone" and was the source of indigenous practice and history — with this demarcation of "folk art", as noted at the symposium, was a result of colonisation, in the introduction of a stratification based on Western aesthetic canons and interpretation. It was at the second symposium in 1993 that a regionalist thinking was explicitly broached. Even so, it was less an aesthetic than a consciousness that was put forward.

Despite the optimistic theme "Towards the Shaping of an ASEAN Visual Arts", as Filipino artist, educator and academic Brenda V. Fajardo

commented at the second Symposium, the theme of the symposium was neither a statement nor an espousal of a singular and distinct ASEAN visual identity, even as traditional aesthetics formed the basis of connection between nations and inspired contemporary expression. Instead, it was to support "an attitude or a move towards an evolving ASEAN consciousness", akin to a national consciousness.

Such a consciousness, one might say, reflects the nature of ASEAN. After all, sovereignty and affinity are at the heart of ASEAN, a dyadic principle that is the origins and narrative of ASEAN, and which may be observed as the founding premise of projects and programmes. That is, even as each nation retains (and promotes) its specificity of cultural forms and practices, as well as narrates the historical developments of its aesthetic directions, links and relations are drawn. As art historian T.K. Sabapathy described in the curatorial introduction to such a regional exhibition specifically produced under the aegis of ASEAN, speaking on the "twin notions of connectedness and continuity": it is "axiomatic" (Sabapathy 1993). In fact, the curatorial basis of this exhibition was a purposeful call to collective reassembling and mutual support.

This exhibition was *36 Ideas: Contemporary Southeast Asian Art*, a project of the ASEAN-COCI that was organised by the Singapore Art Museum (SAM). Conceived in 1999 with curatorial representation from all ten member nations, *36 Ideas* took as its starting point the Asian economic crisis of 1997 that was triggered by a run on the Thai Baht, which then spread to currencies in the region, and its wake of political and social effects. In the curatorial framing, reference was made to a song, *Diobok-Obok*, that had been popular in Java, Indonesia. For the curators, the lyrics which described the water of an aquarium being stirred, resonated with the situation and conditions experienced in Southeast Asia, and served to unpack the region's art. The curators had met in Singapore for a three-day forum on contemporary art practices and discourses, with this discussion — unsurprisingly — "surfacing much that are similar and yet disparate in the artistic developments and preoccupations in Southeast Asia", according to then Director of SAM, Kwok Kian Chow, in his foreword (Singapore Art Museum 2002, 10).

Whereas the artworks — as they often do — presented the specificities of country and condition, the register of regionalism was most evident in the exhibition's expositions. In his essay *Homespun, Worldwide: Colonialism as Critical Inheritance*, art historian and academic Patrick D. Flores, who represented the Philippines in the curatorial team of *36 Ideas*, made a crucial observation extending from the subject of colonial pasts — one of the oft-cited threads that binds the region together — the colonial inheritance of aesthetic education.

Noting that the institution of art was a "vital vein of the civilising mission" (Singapore Art Museum 2002, 17) of colonial rule (Spanish, British, Portuguese, Dutch and French), for Flores, whilst aesthetic inheritance occurred in influences of form, method and appreciation, aesthetic education also resulted in "re-conversion", which he described as the "creative and critical response that is informed by reflexive tactics to represent even that which is repressed." This point was further demonstrated in the accompanying essay by artist Niranjan Rajah who represented Malaysia in the curatorial team. In his essay *Towards a Southeast Asian Paradigm: From Distinct National Modernisms To An Integrated Regional Arena for Art*, Niranjan observed that the colonial influence on aesthetics also served the

nationalist struggle contributing — inadvertently — to colonial resistance, citing Raden Salleh's *The Arrest of Prince Diponegoro* (1858) and Juan Luna's *Spollarium* (1884).

Such exegeses citing connectedness and continuity in content, concerns and developments, remain essential to regionalist readings and exchanges today. Indeed, the Singapore Art Museum's collection of contemporary artworks from the region is developed in recognition and appreciation of the importance and necessity of such intersections. But what these present reflections also bring to the fore is another aspect that is as significant for the regionalist reading as connectedness and continuity. This is the aspect of relation which the emblem of ASEAN represents.

The principle of ASEAN is illustrated in its logo of sheaves of rice stalks — a sheave for each of the member countries — standing together. In the semiotic interpretation, the immediate reading would focus on the sheaves as constituting the same material and stock, even as there are subtle differences among sheaves. Another vital detail in this symbolic designation is, of course, their standing or being bound together. It is this latter feature that the aspect of relation elaborates. Whereas the historical account is one of political and economic exigency, and the cultural account of long traditions underscores exchange and influence, the crux of an aesthetic consciousness of regionalism, as invoked by Fajardo in 1993, is found in relation. Or to put it in another way, of a certain agency and collegiality. If tradition forms the cultural backbone, relation may then be read as the ligaments that, whilst not as structural, performs an indispensable connective role. It is, after all, such connections that had been forged in the discussions of the early 1990s.

To trace the beginnings of such an ASEAN consciousness, it would be useful to recall a lesser-cited historical event involving art historians and cultural practitioners: a meeting in November 1992 at Asia Society in New York City. Convened by Vishakha Desai, appointed Director of Asia Society's galleries in 1990, the three-day event gave rise to both initial and early meetings of figures now familiar in the visual art scene and art history — T.K. Sabapathy of Singapore, John Clark from Australia, Zainol Abidin Ahmad Shariff (also known as Zabas) of Malaysia, Jim Supangkat of Indonesia, Eric Torres of the Philippines, and Apinan Poshyananda of Thailand. As reported in the following year by New York Times art critic, Holland Cotter, Ms Desai's determination to present contemporary art of Asia in New York was "close to revolutionary". The convention in New York was not the first of such meetings though, for Sabapathy, it was bookended by other regional gatherings such as the Salon Malaysia of 1991 and the first Asia Pacific Triennial in Queensland in 1993 helmed by Caroline Turner. Further meetings of the time among these and other influential figures such as Ismail Zain, Redza Piyadasa and Kristen Jit of Malaysia, Rod Paras-Perez and Alice Guillermo of the Philippines, Nguyen Quan of Vietnam, Somporn Rodboon of Thailand, and Ushiroshoji Masahiro of the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, may be seen as significant to the formulation of a regional consciousness at the time via conversations and congregation. In fact, one might say that, like the aquarium being stirred in Diobok-Obok, these meetings and encounters gave rise to consequential articulations of region and regionalism, the ripples of their effects still felt today.

To the question of what constitutes a regionalist reading of Southeast Asian art, the answer remains complex, defying summing up and simple reductiveness (for good reason), in that,

what defines the region is not merely the chronicle of shared history, the effects of exchange and influence, but also a sociability that arises from encounter and event, and a willingness to seek and advance the confluences between nations, places and peoples. Although the reflections here have largely been on the past, one can easily show that the same goes for the present; that the sociability observed in the present mirrors the flows and influences invoked in the historical analysis and relation.

Today, artists, curators, historians, academics, and cultural workers across the region continue to cultivate meaningful and deep relations that connect and shape the region and its art. These processes of interaction, mutual observation and reflection is as much at an intellectual level as it is at a cultural level, involving association, organisation, interlocution and even production. I count amongst these my colleagues helming museums, galleries, organisations, departments and programmes, who are actively initiating and renewing connections and networks in the region.

As for positing a regional aesthetic or consciousness, just as our regional identities are shaped and defined by these processes of encounter and exchange, one might say that such exists, though not in a single form or formula. Rather, it is embedded in the art, and found circulating in conversation and discourse within groups and among individuals, in both formal and casual settings, and, crucially, arising not merely from necessity and need, but with a spontaneity that is fundamental to, and is the essence of, the creative and critical response that is contemporary art, of expression itself. ☐

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Dancing Diversity: Creating Friendships Across Borders

Dr Stephanie Burridge

Adjunct Lecturer,
LASALLE College of the Arts and
Singapore Management University

Research and Documentation Network Co-Chair,
World Dance Alliance Asia Pacific

Friendships across borders

Singapore is a regional hub uniquely placed as a meeting point between the East and the West. With an extensive calendar of dance events from companies and independents embracing diverse dance practices and artistic traditions, a vibrant dance scene that challenges audiences with a matrix of forms, concepts and productions is ensured. Dance across the ASEAN region is a continuum with networks of exchange, shared stories and experiences linking countries and cultures, time-honoured heritages and evolving practices. Eclectic synergising of embodied traditions with globalised dance genres like classical ballet, urban street dance and contemporary are the 'toolbox' of Southeast Asian choreographers who are attracting audiences and international attention through bold innovation.

These interactions have resulted in performances and festivals that feature artists from Asian countries such as China, Japan, Taiwan, Korea, Thailand, Cambodia, India, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Indonesia, and further afield to include Australia, Europe and the United States. Such ventures provide a refreshing necessity for Singaporean artists who work within a small spatial and geographical frame. Shared performances, master-classes, showcases of works-in-progress and after-show dialogues, along with follow-up reverse visits are part of almost every independent choreographer's and local dance company's annual schedules. Historically the dances of the major Singaporean ethnic groups (Chinese, Malay and Indian) have their geneses around the Asian region and it made sense to visit the country where the traditional roots are practised. In Singapore's context, transmigration has resulted in a nuanced, hybrid combination of forms and narratives that are explored and repositioned. Personal beliefs and questions about the contemporary world that exist beyond cultural specificity underpin these interactions. Critics, dance festival presenters and scholars have embraced these developments, recognising a new wave of distinctive choreographic practice.

Continuing traditions

Common to the countries of Southeast Asia are traditions that include tribal, folk and court dances. There exists myriad ethnic, religious and language groups in what has been a dynamic and often volatile political region. Continuing traditions occur alongside new forms of expression brought about initially through colonisation and more recently, globalisation and digital sharing.

Traditional dances from Southeast Asia are alive with symbolism and metaphor. These can be seen in the dancers' representations of gods, animals, mythical beings and the characters from the great epics of the region such as the *Ramayana*. While the narratives of the dance are on the surface descriptive, sophisticated semiotic coding is embodied within hand and eye gestures, postures, and phrases of movement. A dancer is trained to perform the characters with detailed clarity while audiences recognise the attributes of each character and the ability of the dancers to bring these to life in their rendition of the role. Iconic imagery is portrayed through mimetic and metonymic signs in a dance language where complex meaning is navigated through the combination of gestures that extend to abstracted sequences of dance.

Watching a dance performance in the ASEAN region involves a mesh of threads and pathways incorporating different movement vocabularies, dance philosophies, techniques and narratives that interweave. Dance is moving rapidly with a creative confidence that is stimulating audiences and revitalising an interest in the next wave of Asian contemporary dance.

Contemporary expression

In the global village of the 21st century, cultural exchange is an important factor in understanding, celebrating and preserving the diversity of cultures around our region. Diversity emerges from incorporating the sensibilities of Eastern practices such as yoga, martial arts and t'ai chi with Western forms. For instance, Javanese choreographer Eko Supriyanto, a prolific regional collaborator, imbues his creations with new vocabulary based on amalgamating traditional Javanese dance and the martial art form *pencak silat*. This juxtaposition contrasts the calm serenity of one form against the powerful, directness of the other. Another Indonesian choreographer from Sumatra, Boi Sakti, also creates new vocabulary based on these traditional forms interweaving thematic reflections on tradition and change. Both dancers have choreographed in Singapore; Sakti with The Human Expression (T.H.E) (2009) and Singapore Dance Theatre (SDT), (2000 and 2001) and Supriyanto with Maya Dance Theatre in *ANWESHA* – The Quest (2013), and with Raka Maitra, artistic director of CHOWK, at the Graey Festival in 2010. Sakti's poetic choreography *Reminiscing the Moon* (2001) for SDT is doubly significant as it was a special commission for the opening of Singapore's Esplanade Theatres on the Bay (Esplanade) in 2002.

Reminiscing the Moon, Singapore Dance Theatre, 2002. Image courtesy of Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay.

The spectrum of choreography from literal narratives to more abstract work is vast. In August 2017, Era Dance Theatre (Singapore) created *Temasik* in collaboration with the Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris in Malaysia, reviving the traditional art of *taridra*, (a drama presented in the form of dance). An interdisciplinary approach was adopted, featuring a large group of Malay dancers and musicians recounting various parts of the history of the establishment of Singapore as a trading port in the late 13th century during the majestic Sriwijaya era. This was a special opportunity for the young musicians to work together on a large-scale production that incorporated dance-drama elements in a larger narrative. Contemporary dance company T.H.E also explores local stories about heritage and culture in their works shifting between literal and abstract elements. *As It Fades* (2011) for example, looks at loss of heritage through diminished use of dialects and local customs. The Arts Fission, led by artistic director Angela Liong, has an extensive repertoire that has often sought inspiration from rural Asia and is exemplified in its Barefoot Dancers Initiative from 2007, whereby the company travels to seek critical engagement across borders. Other local companies like MAYA Dance Theatre have forged links with the artists Dangnan Pamungkas and Eko Supriyanto from Indonesia while Esplanade's annual *da:ns* festival has commissioned new productions from leading regional artists, such as Cambodia's Amrita Performing Arts, *Brodal Serei (Freestyle Boxing)* (2016), Pichet Klunchun, a traditional *Khon* trained dancer from Thailand, *Dancing with Death* (2016), and Jecko Siompo, dancer/choreographer from Papua Indonesia, *We came from the East* (2011).

Such multi-layered, deeply contextualised works by contemporary choreographers and dancers of the ASEAN region embody many of

Dancing with Death, Pichet Klunchun, 2016. Photo by Bernie Ng. Image courtesy of Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay.

As It Fades (2011) by T.H.E Dance Company at Esplanade Theatre – choreography by Kuik Swee Boon. Photo by Matthew G. Johnson.

the challenges that occur in collaborations that transcend countries, dance traditions, ideas and philosophies. These journeys of cultural exchange are potentially full of risks, defining moments and surprises as artists move out of their established physical and philosophical comfort zones. They are not without controversy, particularly within well-established traditional dance forms where re-interpretation might be considered radical.

Future directions

The development of new Asian movement vocabularies arises from working within the traditions and philosophies of the ASEAN region, and also in response to current societal issues and personal concerns. Like all dance makers, choreographers of Southeast Asia seek to find a unique voice in concept and form. 'Contemporisation' is a trend within the region and the diaspora, with dancers working within their embodied practices as well as travelling internationally to explore new techniques and creative processes. Research and performativity are central to this direction, and the role of dramaturgy in redefining the context as the dialogue between artists and audiences unfolds and shifts has become crucial. Technology is playing an increasingly important part not only by enabling innovative performance options but also as a means of connecting artists. Instances of dancers rehearsing together in different countries and sharing material through online platforms are common in a region where studio space is scarce and resources expensive.

Dance artists across ASEAN are negotiating their place as they join the diversity that is contemporary Asian dance. The current generation of artists work with and within tradition to re-build, re-invent and make unique dance statements utilising training in both Eastern and Western dance forms, bringing new approaches. Innovations in movement vocabulary evolves through a deep-rooted personal understanding of tradition. Rather than simply exploiting the East and West in a confluence of styles, choreographers use imagination to build, select, re-invent, re-define and re-contextualise their identity, giving unique creative voices to their ideas.

Regional performers and choreographers, dance faculty and researchers, as well as students and teachers increasingly come together in gatherings initiated by international organisations like the World Dance Alliance, Dance and the Child International, World Alliance of Arts Educators, Study Group on Ethnochoreology, and many more to share practice, experiences and dialogue about the changing ecology of the art form, opening new conversations and enabling fresh perspectives.

The healing role of the arts and the empowerment of peoples through creative expression cannot be ignored as an element in the current cultural landscape. In Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia and other countries, dance has been crucial in support-ing traumatised children and engaging disenfranchised youth through workshops, community programmes and performances in schools and communities. In Singapore, there is a growing awareness of empowerment through dance in the special needs sector, and several dance artists are contributing and finding creative stimulation in this field.

Historically artists repeatedly seek new forms of expression, and have been inspired by the new and the unfamiliar. Asia is a rich resource with a multiplicity of dance genres and traditions. In an increasingly borderless world they flow through dance experiences across borders. Dance in ASEAN countries is expressed in parallel; continuing lines of focus with the avant-garde occurring alongside traditional and community dance activity. Dance is a continuum that expresses all aspects of life, tradition and change. ☐

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Intercultural Interlocutors: Tay Tong and Faith Tan

Corrie Tan

Writer, editor and theatre critic

With Singapore's geographical location and cultural dislocation in Southeast Asia, the country has been ripe for artistic collaborations that reframe its relationship with the region. Singaporean arts managers have become intercultural interlocutors of sorts, connecting Singapore and its neighbours through the performing arts.

Independent performance company Theatre-Works, formed in 1985, has long been at the fore of these intercultural negotiations. Its arts space 72-13 is not only dedicated to the development of contemporary art in Singapore, but also to the evolution of a broader Asian identity, and acts both as an incubator for artistic experiments as well as a centre for research and development for processes across disciplines and cultures. Tay Tong, who joined the company as a producer in 1989 and eventually became its managing director, produced TheatreWorks' Flying Circus Project[1], led by the company's artistic director Ong Keng Sen since 1996. The project has acted as a catalyst for cultural exchange for artists from the region and the rest of the world, and a stepping stone for new company initiatives such as the Curators Academy[2] (2018). Since 2002, Tay has managed and directed the Continuum Asia Project[3], doing capacity-building work in Luang Prabang, including reviving the Laotian Pharak Phalam, a traditional dance-drama form, and brokering exchanges between Laotian and Asian youths. He is also director of Arts Network Asia.

Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay is Singapore's national performing arts centre and one of the busiest arts centres in the world. It often works in close partnership with local, regional and international artists to develop artistic capabilities. It has presented more than 37,000 performances and drawn more than 26 million patrons since its opening in 2002. Faith Tan is the centre's head of theatre and dance, and has been with the institution since 2003. She steers its flagship da:ns festival, which enters its 13th edition this year. Esplanade has supported over 300 new works from Asian artists in the last five years, and invested in a number of capability and knowledge development programmes. These include da:ns lab, an annual platform for dance practitioners to reflect on key issues surrounding their creative practice. Esplanade also co-presented the first Asian Dramaturgs Network in 2016 with Centre 42, a Singapore incubation space for text-based work.

Tay Tong and **Faith Tan** discuss Singapore's place in Southeast Asia and some of the work that has gone on behind the scenes of their projects. This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.

Corrie Tan: How do you think Singapore tends to position itself in relation to the rest of the region in terms of the arts – and how do you think that relationship has evolved from the time you first started working as a producer?

Tay Tong: I've always felt that we can't really talk about Singapore without looking at its position in Southeast Asia. Singapore is very much a part of Southeast Asia not just geographically, but also historically. We are so porous as an island state, so much so that our Southeast Asian neighbours are, in a sense, our hinterland for trade, for economics, for any kind of development.

Back in the 1970s and up to 1990s when we first did the Flying Circus Project, there was a sense – from my point of view – of some kind of a snobbery towards our Southeast Asian neighbours, despite the fact that we are all bound together by ASEAN. In terms of the arts, we were not looking so much towards our Southeast Asian neighbours. There was very much a positioning of Singapore in

Pesta Raya: Serentak! Sedunia! by Artisari Gentari (2017)
Image courtesy of Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay.

relation to Europe, to the more developed Asian countries in East Asia and in North Asia, and to North America.

I remember that in 1991-1992, when TheatreWorks wanted to do an ASEAN season – it bombed. At the time, we were so used to having a ready audience. One of the plays was *Trip to the South* by Tony Perez, and it was directed by Nonon Padilla – a Filipino play directed by a Filipino director working with Singaporean actors. The other work we had was by Arifin C. Noer from Indonesia, and he directed Singaporean actors like Lim Kay Siu and K Rajagopal. The third work was with Malaysia's Five Arts Centre, which brought down a three-weekend festival comprising visual art, installation art, and performance. Then there was a Singapore Season that was largely made up of new Singaporean writing. But the audience were not quite ready for the ASEAN season, so the only success was the Singaporean work. But that never stopped us. Culturally, Southeast Asia is so rich, and there was so much that we young Singaporean practitioners did not know about. We wanted to engage because we didn't feel culturally adequate; we are a very young country, but their cultures go back centuries.

Faith Tan: Speaking from a position of how Esplanade relates to the region, it is important that we work closely with Southeast Asian artists and producers to stay connected to developments within the varying scenes, and respond by supporting projects that resonate within our programming or address a critical need. We do so through many annual festivals and platforms, where we are increasingly supporting new productions from the region. These platforms include Pesta Raya, our Malay festival of arts which explores both the traditional and contemporary face of the Nusantara (Malay Archipelago), and da:ns festival, where we have taken a leading role in commissioning and creating work with Southeast Asian contemporary dance artists because there has been a void of such regular support.

Pesta Raya: Tarian Malam by Nan Jombang Dance (2012)
Image courtesy of Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay.

The position we take is a long-term one. For example, Esplanade's relationship with Thai dancemaker Pichet Klunchun began in 2007 with the presentation of one of his smaller productions. This marked the beginning of many years of working together, from showcasing his classical Thai Khon dances for free in our outdoor spaces, to commissioning full-length productions. This continued support enabled him to form a full-time dance company, and tour productions internationally. Being able to present his work regularly allowed us to develop audiences, and we've taken care to contextualise and inform audiences of not just an artist's productions, but the context of their practice too. With Pichet's last work at Esplanade, we created a pre-show talk by his dramaturg on the history and key points of Pichet's career thus far, as well as an exhibition of Pichet's drawings of dance poses that form the foundation of his dance from his classical roots.

It is hoped that through the steady work we do, we can continue to keep expanding local audiences' support and interest in artists' works from Asia, contributing to a dynamic and supportive ecosystem between regional artists and audiences.

Corrie Tan: Tay Tong, when the Flying Circus Project was first conceived in 1994, how did negotiations begin in order to get funders and partners on board?

Tay Tong: We approached many potential corporate partners and public institutions and we drew a blank. There was no support. But the Japan Foundation had started a special section called Asia Center. Back in 1992, the Asia Center had brought TheatreWorks' *Three Children*, as well as *Beauty World*, to Japan on tour. We approached them for support, and they eventually supported the first edition. For Japan, it was part of their cultural diplomacy push, but we were more concerned about how we could harness the richness of Southeast Asia. In the 1990s, Singapore was a bridge between Southeast Asia and a bit of the rest of the world, because we were able to

function in particular languages and we had the potential to make inroads into the region. You'd get North American or European contacts who would ask, "Can you tell us more about Southeast Asia?" There was a desire for knowledge – it wasn't just TheatreWorks who wanted to harness all that was available in Southeast Asia; other people were also thinking along the same lines.

The Flying Circus Project was very good for Ong Keng Sen, and therefore the company, including myself, benefited from it. There was the need to do research. We called on contacts in Southeast Asia to say, "Hey, we're going to do this programme – who should we meet? Who is interesting in Southeast Asia, doing contemporary work? Who are the traditional artists who are interesting?" From that, we developed a list of artists. But at the same time, having that conversation made us realise that we Southeast Asian practitioners and arts workers didn't really know each other. That question stuck with us.

Sometime in 1999, Keng Sen convened a meeting of peers, including the late Krishen Jit, Marion D'Cruz, Amna Kusumo and Teresa Rances[4]. We all came together and realised that, yes, we didn't really know each other, and that we only really got to meet fellow Asian and Southeast Asian artists when they were all doing residencies in places like New York. So, what could we do? How could we find a way, and find the resources, for us to get to meet each other? And beyond meeting each other, how could we make work together? That's how Arts Network Asia started. A proposal was written up for Ford Foundation Jakarta, and they managed to pull funds for it. This started with micro grants, which included mobility funding for people to do research etc., but we also supported collaborative projects [among artists and cultural workers]. It was ground-up, and there was no political agenda, because it was non-governmental funding.

Publicity image for TheatreWorks' 2013 edition of the Flying Circus Project.
Image courtesy of TheatreWorks (S) Ltd

Arts and culture have allowed us to cross borders that even cultural diplomacy couldn't, such as going into Myanmar. There was no way an official agency could get into Myanmar in the 1990s, because there were so many sanctions on the country. But through arts and culture, through people-to-people exchanges, we could begin to understand the country and have a two-way conversation: inviting their artists out, as well as us going in. For the 1998 Flying Circus Project, Myanmar was one of our countries of focus. That relationship continued, and in 2013 the Flying Circus Project went back to Myanmar after it opened up.

Corrie Tan: How do you balance nurturing long-term relationships with artists and practitioners over the years with giving a platform to new relationships or emerging artists?

Faith Tan: For me, the starting point of a relationship with an artist is to get to know them and their work as much as I can – understanding the conditions, trends, and significant issues (including political or socio-economic contexts) that impact their dance-making. For example, within dance in Southeast Asia, it's important to understand how tradition, ritual, and hierarchy were integral to their history, and impact dance-making today. I travel to attend performances and festivals, have lots of conversations with people working in dance across Asia, watch rehearsals, works-in-progress and productions live or on video.

This allows me to look at dance within a context and understand all the conditions impacting artists. It allows me to go beyond finding a "good show" for Esplanade, and to understand what the artists need, and respond with a support system that is fluid, tailored to their individual strengths as well as the gaps. I'm not interested in providing a grant of financial support and leaving it up to the artist to figure the rest out. I'm interested in ascertaining what other kinds of support would help to elevate the process and ultimately the production.

Publicity image for TheatreWorks' Continuum Asia Project in Laos.
Image courtesy of TheatreWorks (S) Ltd

While I have established long-term relationships with some artists over the 15 years I've been working with in dance, I also keep looking for artists I don't know, or are emerging, to connect with. I may see them in programmes I watch when I travel, or their names may come up in conversations with practitioners, producers, dramaturgs and artists who work in this region. I often ask people if they have seen any exciting new works or artists they liked. Within Esplanade, we've taken a responsive approach to the platforms we have, meaning that if a project or artist comes up, regardless if they are emerging, mid-career or established, if there is a need to present their work, we would respond by finding or creating a platform.

Tay Tong: Singapore, even in the past, was seen as the place with the resources and the money – "Oh, you're developed, you could do this, you could bring it in for us" – and we were very careful about that. This is not a top-down working relationship, it needs to be on an equal plane. With the Continuum Asia Project in 2002, for example, it was important for us to be invited into Laos by Laotian artists. Keng Sen was in Luang Prabang to do research for the Flying Circus Project, and we were looking at Laotian artists to bring over to Singapore. The traditional masters were saying to him, "Look, we are all getting old, there are no younger people doing this, how can we continue?" This question stayed with us, and later on we had the opportunity to write to the Rockefeller Foundation, who supported the programme for two years, and we also had additional funding from Ford Foundation. We were invited in because they had no state support. In the end, we were able to do two particular strands of work, and one of them was excavating the nine episodes of the Pharak Phalam with the masters, a passing on of this art form.

One of the most important things I've learnt is that you must treat others with respect, and on an equal playing field. At the end of the day, you're talking about people-to-people engagement and encounters. We've always made sure that everybody has the same terms. When we first did the Flying Circus Project, everybody stayed in the same hotel or hostel. There's no preferential treatment. Then you gain people's trust. And participants understand that when they're doing explorations in the Flying Circus Project, for example, and we say that this is an open space, it's an equal space – they believe that. Keng Sen creates an equal space in the studio, but my job is to create an equal space outside of the studio.

Corrie Tan: Faith, what are the current needs or gaps that you see in capability development for dancemakers both in Singapore and the region?

Faith Tan: I recently attended a brainstorming session with colleagues from Asia and Australia to discuss a Dance Network for Asia, where we listed all the platforms for performance presentation, funding, and residencies or process-based support. There was a long list of platforms for presentations and festivals, but a very short list for funding bodies and research grants across Asia, and an even shorter list for dance residencies and process-based support for dance within Asia. If there is no funding for research, how will dancemakers who aren't able to get international support or have such mobility be able to develop a focused contemporary practice within Asia and stay in Asia? As it stands, dancemakers often don't invest in longer processes for research, having become accustomed to operating under limited resources, and the expectation to keep creating "finished" productions.

A session during *da:ns lab*.
Image courtesy of Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay.

I feel more grants and initiatives to support dance research, process and residencies would be highly beneficial to dancemakers across Asia. In Singapore, one exciting recent development is the National Arts Council's Dance Nucleus, which supports process-based critical research for independent dance artists. The Esplanade's da:ns lab was also created in response to this need, and every year we shift its focus according to what is urgent. In its first year (2015) we focused on identifying what independent practice means, and in our third edition last year we examined artistic practice in relation to the ongoing global political crisis. With the support of the National Arts Council and Goethe-Institut, we were able to invite six dancemakers from Asia to be participants. It's important for performing arts institutions like Esplanade to be able to create spaces not only for presentations, but also for other parts of the creation process that are inclusive to artists beyond our own country, especially when there is a great need for it.

Corrie Tan: How do you think policymakers in Singapore and Southeast Asia can help to make artistic collaborations on the ground easier, whether in terms of funding, infrastructure or mindsets?

Faith Tan: The challenge that institutions, funders and policymakers often have is to justify the use of the funds to support art, and thus establish clear outcomes from an investment. Sometimes risk-taking and failure in an outcome-based system is hard to build in. However, if we see each contribution we make as a small but essential step that collectively, over a very long time, is essential to moving dance forward, then we accept that there are no grand, instant outcomes that will come out of one project or one platform.

In Asia, funding conditions are also often limited to the country's artists who have nationality there; however given the way some contemporary artists work now, living in several cities, I believe adopting the style of funding that I've seen Goethe-Institut take – where it supports artists who are based in and work significantly within Germany, in spite of their nationality – is a useful one that also attracts talented artists from beyond one's country to invest in another location. In this wider sense of collaboration, I feel this would open up the movement and flow of ideas and dialogues within dance, and create different energies and possibilities for creativity.

Tay Tong: Can we imagine our Southeast Asia, our ASEAN, as something like the European Union? If I make a work in Brussels, for example, I can tour it very easily across Europe. Why can't we do that in Southeast Asia? I'd like to convince Singaporean policymakers that we can be an enabler for the region. If we can build capacity in other countries, there will be returns by way of opening up new markets for the kind of art that we would like to share. The Singaporean market is saturated, and if we don't begin to see the outside world as our next market, our hinterland, we're going to collapse.

One of the things I really want to do is to show Singaporeans good models of practice in Southeast Asia where artists and arts groups have no or very little government support and resources, but they make things work. Why is it possible for them, but not possible for us? I feel like there's something to be learnt there. There are still certain kinds of experiences that we can share. For example, we are a bit more organised in terms of funding, in terms of infrastructure, and to a certain extent, management support. We can give that kind of advice. But I think the region doesn't need Singapore as a bridge any longer. The rest of the world is going directly to our Southeast Asian neighbours, so that role is no longer available for us, it's no longer sustainable.

I hope that Singapore will continue to adopt the sense of openness that has always been the success of the country: being open, being porous, and not being protectionist. The world has become so much more complex, more intricate, and more expensive. We can no longer do this kind of work by ourselves. On the ground, we can work with artists and colleagues to get a buy-in, and we can build connectivity. But then we need policymakers to talk to their colleagues and neighbours and get them to think in the same way.

Corrie Tan: How do you see your role as a producer continuing to develop, when it comes to navigating regional connections for practitioners or audiences?

Tay Tong: I really believe in the value of the internationalism of the arts. I'm speaking generally here, but I think that one of the issues with Singapore is that we are so well-off compared to our neighbours that we've become entitled. And, sadly, that sense of entitlement leads to insularity and navel-gazing. The reality of the situation is that if you take away these resources, how do you compete with our Southeast Asian colleagues? They are often much hungrier and much savvier when it comes to navigating the complexities of the international scene. I really want to find a way to encourage more of our Singaporean artists to put themselves out there.

Faith Tan: As an arts venue, we connect artists and their productions to audiences in Singapore. One of the challenges is that while the programmers and producers understand the context of the artist's work, Singaporeans coming to watch a performance may not. It's important that audiences have a dialogue with the work and understand its significance beyond what they see on stage. Therefore the team at Esplanade has been thinking hard about how we can deepen this conversation with the audience meaningfully, going beyond the post-performance talk. For me, this is the next stage of audience appreciation, and is key to getting more people invested in supporting and talking about Asian artists. ☐

Notes

1. The Flying Circus Project, established in 1996, is a long-term, process-based programme exploring creative expression in Asia. The inter-disciplinary, research and development programme consists of performances, screenings, conversations, laboratories, workshops, talks and engagement by visiting artists.

2 The Curators Academy is a programme that brings aspiring curators in Southeast Asia together, with an emphasis on developing a context and "growing" performance that engages and interrogates the politics of the local. The academy is interdisciplinary, with a focus on performance. Participants engage in dialogue with invited trainers, and the first edition of the academy included lectures, performances, discussions, and artist talks and presentations.

3 The Continuum Asia Project is an Asian arts exchange project in Laos that engages the local youth, elder master artists and international Asian artists.

4 Husband-wife duo Krishen Jit and Marion D'Cruz were two of the original founders of the Five Arts Centre in Malaysia; he was a dramatist, practitioner and academic, she is a pioneering contemporary dancer-choreographer. Amna Kusumo is a pioneering arts manager from Indonesia and founder of the Kelola Foundation. Teresa Rances is an arts administrator from the Philippines and programme director with the Asian Cultural Council.

Stamping Cultural Diplomacy

Lucille Yap

Senior Curator,
Singapore Philatelic Museum

Stamps are more than tiny pieces of colourful gummed paper that are used to pay for the carriage of mail. Every stamp is unique and informative and reflects the rich and diverse facets of a nation. Stamps are the pride of a nation.

Since Singapore became a republic in 1965, every stamp issue, starting from its first in 1966, has mirrored the different aspects of the nation. These stamps have showcased our political, economic and social development, our vibrant multi-racial culture, our arts and crafts, our flora and fauna, and our links with the world.

They also serve as our ambassadors to the world. Visitors to Singapore have adorned their postcards and letters home with stamps. Similarly, stamps have been affixed to the millions of letters that Singaporeans have mailed to their loved ones, friends and business associates abroad. In this way, the Singapore story has been brought to all corners of the globe.

As 2018 is the year Singapore takes over the Chairmanship of ASEAN, this essay shows how stamps have helped to document and cement Singapore's relations with her ASEAN counterparts and how they can also help to connect the region on a people-to-people level.

Stamps as Political Tools

Stamps are powerful tools. They are used to express territorial sovereignties and boundaries, political ideologies and policies, international and regional alliances, and bilateral relations.

In the context of Singapore, as a republic, stamps were issued to celebrate and commemorate our membership or participation in international and regional intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations and events. To date, Singapore has issued stamps to commemorate its involvement in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Commonwealth of Nations, Universal Postal Union (UPU), Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Southeast Asian Games, Asian Games, Olympic Games, International Olympic Committee (IOC), International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), and United Nations' International Year of Cooperatives (IYC) in 2012.

Figure 1. First day cover of “Visit ASEAN Year” stamps, 4 April 1971.
Collection of Singapore Philatelic Museum, National Heritage Board.

Stamps on ASEAN

One of the most important intergovernmental organisations for Singapore is ASEAN. ASEAN was established on 8 August 1967 in Bangkok, Thailand. The founding member countries were Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. Today, it is a union of ten Southeast Asian countries with the aim to accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region, and to promote regional peace and stability.

The first Singapore stamp issue related to ASEAN was launched on 4 April 1971, only four years after the establishment of ASEAN. The title of the issue was “Visit ASEAN Year” (Figure 1). Cooperation in tourism was one of the earliest areas of ASEAN activities. Projects were aimed at promoting the ASEAN region as a tourist destination, preserving the ASEAN cultural and environmental heritage, promoting intra-ASEAN travel and human resource development in the tourism section (ASEAN Secretariat 2012).

The themes featured on the stamps were trishaws, the Singapore River, a scene at a Chinese temple, the Singapore waterfront skyline, and places of worship. These stamps were issued shortly after the ASEAN Tourism Association (ASEANTA) was formed on 27 March 1971. ASEANTA is a non-profit tourism association. It has members from public and private tourism sectors in ASEAN, hotel and restaurant associations, airlines, and National Tourism Organisations. Its objective is to focus on the development and promotion of tourism destinations and attractions, and the supporting infrastructure within the ASEAN region.

“Through its humble beginning, ASEANTA has grown to become a tourism association of influence within the ASEAN tourism landscape, playing an integral role in shaping tourism development growth and policies in the ASEAN region.” (ASEANTA Secretariat 2013)

Figure 2. First day cover of "25th Anniversary of ASEAN: Visit ASEAN Year 1992" stamps, 8 August 1992. Collection of Singapore Philatelic Museum, National Heritage Board.

The next "Visit ASEAN Year" stamps were issued in 1992 (Figure 2). "Visit ASEAN Year 1992" was noted to be the biggest tourism promotion in the region. It was one of the most concrete achievements of ASEAN tourism organisations. For the period of 1991 – 1995, the growth of ASEAN tourism was phenomenal. It was more than two-fold the world's arrivals and over that of the Asia-Pacific region (ASEAN Secretariat 2012).

The official launch of the "Visit ASEAN Year 1992" took place at the 10th ASEAN Tourism Forum held in Bandung, Indonesia on 13 January 1991 (ASEAN Secretariat 1991). The campaign was aimed at promoting the diversity of cultures and attractions in the six ASEAN nations consisting of the five founding members and Brunei Darussalam who had joined the group in 1984. A set of stamps, carrying the theme of the tourism campaign, was issued on 8 August 1992 to celebrate the 25th anniversary of ASEAN. These stamps expressed refreshing, colourful and vibrant designs, capturing the spirit of ASEAN.

Stamps on ASEAN Members and Anniversaries

ASEAN started off as a union of Singapore and four neighbouring countries during more turbulent times. The 10th anniversary was celebrated in 1977. The five founding member countries issued commemorative stamps on 8 August 1977 to mark the occasion. Flags and maps of the five members were featured on the stamps (Figure 3).

Figure 3. From left: "10th Anniversary of ASEAN" stamps issued by Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand, 8 August 1977. Collection of Singapore Philatelic Museum, National Heritage Board.

The ASEAN logo or emblem appeared on the 15th anniversary stamps issued by the five countries (Figure 4). The emblem is a bundle of rice stalks. Beneath it is the acronym "ASEAN" in blue. Each stalk of rice represents a member country which is bound together in friendship and solidarity, and set on a field of yellow encircled by a blue border. The use of rice stalks to represent each member is very appropriate as rice cultivation is indigenous to Southeast Asia and rice is the staple food of the member countries. Brown stands for strength and stability, yellow for prosperity, and blue for the spirit of cordiality in which ASEAN affairs are conducted (ASEAN Secretariat 2012).

The policy-making body of ASEAN is the annual meeting of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers. The meeting is responsible for the formulation of policy guidelines and coordination of all ASEAN activities. The 15th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting was held in Singapore from 14 to 16 June 1982. Under the ASEAN Charter, Article 31, the Chairmanship of ASEAN rotates annually based on the alphabetical order of the English names of the member countries. A member country assuming the Chairmanship chairs the ASEAN Summit and related summits, the ASEAN Coordinating Council, the three ASEAN Community Councils, relevant ASEAN Sectorial Ministerial Bodies and senior officials, and the Committee of Permanent Representatives (ASEAN Secretariat 2012).

Figure 4. "15th Anniversary of ASEAN" stamps issued by Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. The ASEAN emblem shown on the stamps was the original version. Collection of Singapore Philatelic Museum, National Heritage Board.

This first day cover in Figure 5 was autographed by the foreign ministers of the five founding member countries who were present at the 15th Ministerial Meeting held in Singapore in 1982.

In 1984, Brunei Darussalam joined ASEAN as the sixth member. The addition to the membership was reflected in the ASEAN emblem. The five stalks of rice were increased to six. Stamps which were issued to commemorate the 20th anniversary of ASEAN featured the revised emblem (Figure 6).

Eleven years later, Vietnam became the seventh member of ASEAN on 28 July 1995. Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR) and Myanmar were admitted to ASEAN as the eighth and ninth members on 23 July 1997, and Cambodia as the 10th member of ASEAN on 30 April 1999. The increase in membership was reflected in the stamps that were issued on 8 August 1997 (Figure 7). However, the ASEAN emblem showed 10 stalks of rice instead of nine. This is because ASEAN was prepared for the entry of Cambodia as a new member together with Lao PDR and Myanmar on 23 July 1997 but that did not happen as planned. Cambodia's entry was delayed to 1999 due to domestic violence that broke out in the country.

Figure 5. First Day Cover of the "15th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting" stamps. Autographs from top left to right: Air Chief Marshal Siddhi Savetsila, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand; Professor Dr. Mochtar Kusumaatmadja, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia; General Carlos P. Romulo, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Philippines; Mr Suppiah Dhanabalan, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Singapore; and Tan Sri Haji Muhammad Ghazali Shafie, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Malaysia, 14 June 1982. Collection of Singapore Philatelic Museum, National Heritage Board. Cover donated by Professor Tommy Koh.

Figure 6. "20th Anniversary of ASEAN" stamps issued by Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand, 8 August 1987. Collection of Singapore Philatelic Museum, National Heritage Board.

Figure 7. First Day Cover of the "30th Anniversary of ASEAN" stamps. In anticipation of having 10 members, the ASEAN emblems were revised to reflect 10 stalks of rice. To celebrate this monumental milestone, Singapore's stamps were designed to be semi-circular in shape. These are the first and only semi-circular stamps issued by Singapore thus far. 8 August 1997. Collection of Singapore Philatelic Museum, National Heritage Board.

In 2007, all 10 members of ASEAN celebrated the 40th anniversary by jointly issuing a special stamp issue comprising 10 stamps in a single issue. Each stamp represented a member country featuring a historical or important building of that country. In philatelic terms, this form of joint stamp issue is known as omnibus issue (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Omnibus stamp sheet issued to commemorate "40 Years of ASEAN – ASEAN Joint Stamp Issue" launched by all 10 countries. 8 August 2007. Collection of Singapore Philatelic Museum, National Heritage Board.

Since 2013, ASEAN member countries have collaborated on the project "Joint Stamp Issue of ASEAN Community". In 2015, Thailand Post Company Limited was put in charge of organising the ASEAN stamp and postmark design competition for a "Joint Stamp Issue of ASEAN Community". The theme of the stamp was "One Vision, One Identity, One Community". Submissions by the 10 countries were received. The winning entries for both the stamp and postmark were submitted by Vietnam. The issuance of this single stamp by 10 countries reflected the unity of the ASEAN Community (Figure 9).

ASEAN has come a long way since 1967. On 8 August 2017, ASEAN celebrated its 50th anniversary. It has "made extraordinary progress in preserving peace and security, promoting

Figure 9. "Joint Stamp Issue of ASEAN Community" stamp issue to commemorate ASEAN 48th anniversary. The ASEAN Community was formally established on 31 December 2015. It comprises the ASEAN Political-Security Community, the ASEAN Economic Community and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community. 8 August 2015. Collection of Singapore Philatelic Museum, National Heritage Board.

economic cooperation and integration as well as social development. An important milestone in this 50-year journey was the formal establishment of the ASEAN Community at the end of 2015 …" (ASEAN Secretariat 2017). To celebrate the Golden Jubilee, a common-themed stamp was issued by each member country in 2017, except for Brunei Darussalam which did not participate in this joint stamp issue. The theme chosen for the monumental milestone was national flowers. All the stamps featured the new ASEAN Post logo (Figure 10).

Stamps on ASEAN Economic Cooperation

Cooperation in transportation and communications were top-of-mind when ASEAN was established. Well-developed and interconnected infrastructure was necessary to accelerate trade. Establishing good and efficient transport and communication services and facilities across ASEAN would reduce transaction costs in trade. Thus, one of the major projects undertaken was to set up a robust communication infrastructure to link up the ASEAN member countries through submarine cables by 1983.

The ASEAN Submarine Cable Network construction was split into four sections. The first three sections linked the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand to Singapore. Stamps were issued to commemorate this milestone in Singapore's history of communications. These series of stamps were designed in a round shape.

Figure 10. From left: Rumdul (*Mitrella Mesnyi*) of Cambodia, Moon Orchid (*Phalaenopsis Amabilis*) of Indonesia, Dok Champa (*Plumeria rubra*) of Laos, Hibiscus of Malaysia (*Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*), Padauk (*Pterocarpus Indicus*) of Myanmar, Sampaguita (*Jasminum sambac*) of the Philippines, Vanda Miss Joaquim of Singapore, Ratchaphreuk (*Cassia fistula Linn*) of Thailand, and Lotus of Vietnam (*Nelumbo nucifera*). Collection of Singapore Philatelic Museum, National Heritage Board. Collection donated by Vietnam Post.

Figure 11. "ASEAN Submarine Cable Network: Singapore – Philippines Cable Link" stamp issue. 3 October 1978. Collection of Singapore Philatelic Museum, National Heritage Board.

Figure 12. "ASEAN Submarine Cable Network: Indonesia – Singapore Cable Link" stamp issue. 8 August 1980. Collection of Singapore Philatelic Museum, National Heritage Board.

Figure 13. "Inaugural Ceremony for the ASEAN Submarine Cable: Completion of Malaysia – Singapore – Thailand Cable Link" stamp issue. 27 September 1983. Collection of Singapore Philatelic Museum, National Heritage Board.

Figure 14. "ASEAN Trade Fair '80" stamps. 3 October 1980. Collection of Singapore Philatelic Museum, National Heritage Board.

The first section of the submarine cable network was laid in 1978 with landing points at Currimao, Ilocos Norte in the Philippines, and Katong in Singapore (Figure 11). The second section was laid in 1980 linking Ancol in Indonesia to Changi in Singapore (Figure 12) (Glover 2018). The third was laid in 1983 between Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand (Figure 13). The last section was completed in the same year between Thailand and the Philippines.

To promote and boost intra-ASEAN trade amongst ASEAN members as well as to promote the international trade of the member countries, the biennial ASEAN Trade Fair series was introduced. The fair was an exhibition of industry and business firms representing ASEAN products and services. Singapore hosted the ASEAN Trade Fair '80 at the World Trade Centre from 3 to 12 October 1980. The fair, which was attended by 300 companies from five ASEAN countries, aimed to "arouse interest between ASEAN nationals to trade more amongst themselves and visitors from outside the ASEAN region to increase their economic relationships with ASEAN businessmen" (Goh 1980). It was the first trade fair hosted by Singapore. A set of stamps was released to commemorate the event (Figure 14).

Stamps in Cultural Diplomacy

Stamps have also been issued to celebrate bilateral relations between Singapore and other countries. Typically, stamps bearing mutually agreed upon themes and designs are jointly issued by the two countries on the same date. The first joint stamp issued by Singapore was in 1996, together with China to commemorate the Suzhou Industrial Project. This was followed by a joint stamp issue with Thailand, the first ASEAN member country, on 9 October 1997. The theme chosen for the Singapore – Thailand joint issue was sea shells (Figure 15).

Figure 15. Miniature Sheet of "Singapore – Thailand Joint Issue: Sea Shells". 9 October 1997. Collection of Singapore Philatelic Museum, National Heritage Board.

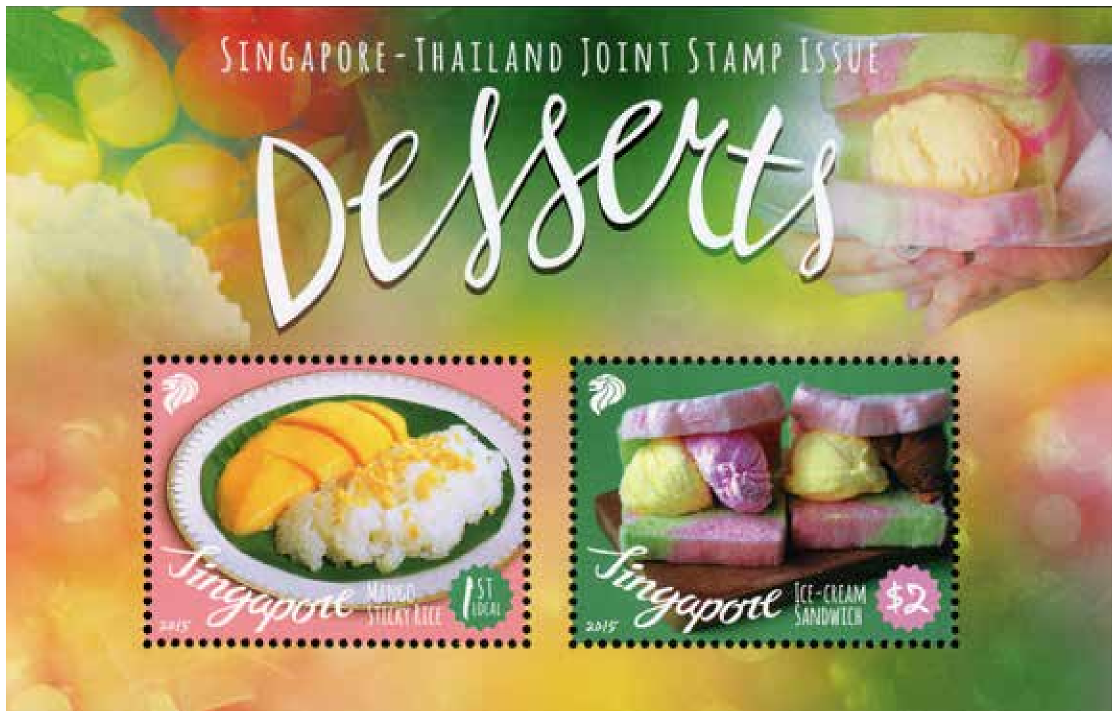

Figure 16. Miniature Sheet of "Singapore – Thailand Joint Stamp Issue: Desserts". 18 September 2015. Collection of Singapore Philatelic Museum, National Heritage Board.

To celebrate 50 years of diplomatic relations between the two countries, another set of joint stamps was issued on 18 September 2015. The theme for these stamps was desserts; ice-cream sandwich for Singapore and mango sticky rice for Thailand (Figure 16).

Singapore has also issued joint stamps with other ASEAN member countries – Malaysia (Figure 17), Vietnam (Figure 18 and 19), Indonesia (Figure 20 and 21), Philippines (Figure 22), and Brunei Darussalam (Figure 23).

Singapore and Vietnam released two joint stamp issues. The first was in 2008 to commemorate 35 years of diplomatic relations (Figure 18) and the second in 2013 to mark the 40th anniversary of diplomatic relations (Figure 19).

Singapore and Indonesia also issued two joint stamp issues. The first was in 2009 featuring the theme of tourist attractions in both countries (Figure 20). The second was in 2017 featuring corals to commemorate the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries (Figure 21).

To commemorate 40 years of close diplomatic relations between Singapore and the Philippines, a set of joint stamps was issued on 28 August 2009. The theme, 'Bridges' was chosen to signify the strong, multi-faceted ties between both countries (Figure 22).

Figure 17. First Day Cover of "Singapore – Malaysia Joint: Birds" stamps. 27 June 2002.
Collection of Singapore Philatelic Museum, National Heritage Board.

Figure 18. Miniature Sheet of "Singapore – Vietnam Joint Issue: Fruits". Popular fruits from both countries – durian for Singapore and dragon fruit for Vietnam – were featured. In Singapore, the stamps were launched at the closing of the country-themed exhibition "Journey to the Land of Lotus" at the Singapore Philatelic Museum. 18 November 2008. Collection of Singapore Philatelic Museum, National Heritage Board.

Figure 19. Miniature Sheet of "Joint Stamp Issue between Singapore and Vietnam" issued to commemorate the 40th of diplomatic relations between the two countries. The Grey Peacock Pheasant of Vietnam and Red Junglefowl of Singapore were featured. 12 September 2013. Collection of Singapore Philatelic Museum, National Heritage Board.

Figure 20. First Day Cover of "Singapore – Indonesia Joint Issue: Tourist Attractions". 28 October 2009. Collection of Singapore Philatelic Museum, National Heritage Board.

Figure 21. Miniature Sheet of "Singapore – Indonesia Joint Stamp Issue: Corals". In Singapore, the stamps were unveiled at the Istana by Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and Indonesian President Joko Widodo, as part of the 2017 Singapore – Indonesia Leaders' Retreat. 7 September 2017. Collection of Singapore Philatelic Museum, National Heritage Board.

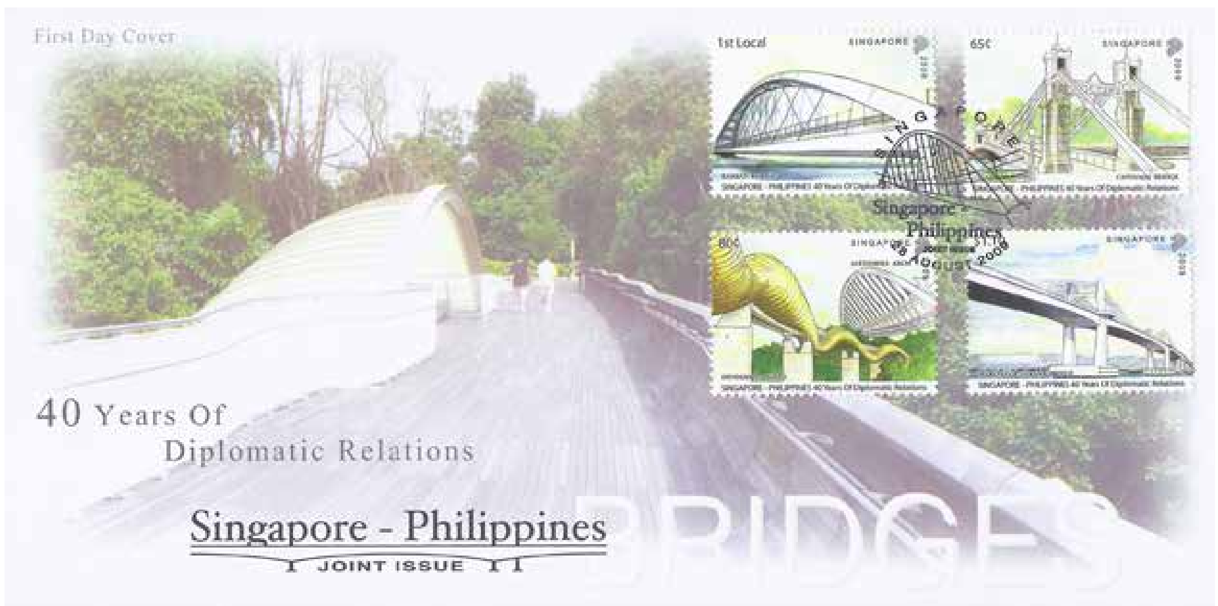

Figure 22. First Day Cover of "Singapore-Philippines Joint Issue: Bridging Strong Diplomatic Relationship". Bridges featured are Henderson Waves and Alexandra Arch in Singapore, and Bamban Bridge and Marcelo Fernan Bridge in the Philippines. 28 August 2009. Collection of Singapore Philatelic Museum, National Heritage Board.

Figure 23. First Day Cover of "Singapore – Brunei Joint Issue: 45th Anniversary of Currency Interchangeability" Miniature Sheet. 27 November 2012. Collection of Singapore Philatelic Museum, National Heritage Board.

Singapore and Brunei issued a joint stamp issue to commemorate the 45th anniversary of the Currency Interchangeability Agreement (CIA) in 2012. The stamps featured the back of the 40th CIA anniversary commemorative note issued in 2007, while the other two showcase the respective iconic elements printed on Singapore and Brunei currency notes (Figure 23).

The deep and long-lasting friendship between Singapore and Brunei Darussalam is reflected in the fully interchangeable currencies of the two countries. Singapore and Brunei signed the CIA on 12 June 1967. Under this unique Agreement, the Brunei dollar and the Singapore dollar are regarded as "customary tender" when circulated in each other's country. The Monetary Authority of Brunei Darussalam and the Monetary Authority of Singapore will accept the currency issued by the other, and to exchange it at par and without charge, into their own currency. Therefore, the public can use the respective currencies of Brunei and Singapore in either country at par and banks in both countries will accept the currencies for deposit at par.

The Golden Jubilee of CIA was celebrated by both countries in 2017 with a joint stamp exhibition "Abode of Peace & the Lion City: A Brunei – Singapore Exhibition" held at the Singapore Philatelic Museum from July 2017 to March 2018 in Singapore, and at the Art Gallery from Nov 2017 to April 2018 in Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei Darussalam. The exhibition in Singapore was officially opened on 5 July 2017 by the Prime Minister of Singapore, Mr Lee Hsien Loong and the Sultan of Brunei, Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah. The exhibition in Brunei Darussalam was opened by the Deputy Prime Minister of Singapore and Coordinating Minister for National Security, Mr Teo Chee Hean and Crown Prince of Brunei, Prince Haji Al-Muhtadee Billah on 4 November 2017.

Stamps – More Than Just Payment of Postage

To conclude, stamps are more than a receipt of prepayment of postage. As demonstrated in this essay, stamps carry national messages and statements, and play an important role in cultural diplomacy. The wide range of topics covered on stamps provides a wealth of information, ranging from history to geography, science, maths, arts and culture, heritage and tradition, life-style, and much more. Stamps are therefore excellent educational resources.

At the Singapore Philatelic Museum, stamps in the museum collections are used as teaching tools to introduce national history, heritage, and culture, and act as windows to the world to give visitors a glimpse of the world around us. ☐

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Re-presenting Southeast Asia: Asian Civilisations Museum

Kennie Ting

Director,
Asian Civilisations Museum

Group Director of Museums,
National Heritage Board

Southeast Asia is a liminal place, an in-between, hard-to-define almost-continent straddling the maritime trade routes linking the grand civilisations of India and China. It is not quite South nor East, but an uneasy South-East; and for a few brief centuries, even West – regional headquarters to the colonising European powers.

Until very recently, "Southeast Asia" as a term and a geography did not even exist. The region was a nameless backdrop throughout much of antiquity to various fabled polities and regional empires – the Chersonesus Aurea and Suvarnadvipa, Funan and Chenla, Angkor and Bagan, Srivijaya, Majapahit and Nusantara.

When the Europeans swept in with their guns and monopolies, they defined the region in relation to India, variously referring to it as the "East Indies", or "Farther India". And then again, it was really only the tiny Spice Islands in the far eastern corner of the almost-continent that initially held their attention. Meanwhile, the Chinese referred generically – and perhaps also a little dismissively – to it during the same period as Nanyang or 南洋, which translates into "oceans to the south". The actual territory itself, those scattered peninsulas and islands in the oceans to the south, did not even feature in the name.

The geographical boundaries of Southeast Asia are most tangibly circumscribed by way of an extremely recent phenomenon – the establishment of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1967, and the gradual expansion of this multilateral organisation to encompass 10 neighbouring, post-colonial (with the exception of Thailand) nations in 1999.

The boundaries of Southeast Asia are today understood to correspond almost exactly with the collective national boundaries of the ASEAN bloc, with the nation-states of Timor-Leste and Papua New Guinea seeking accession too, and therefore prefiguring a further expansion of said boundaries.

ASEAN, therefore, necessarily and inevitably, grounds any exploration or discussion on the "Southeast Asian". Certainly, ASEAN, and Singapore's chairmanship of it in 2018, are the instigating factors behind the "Year of Southeast Asia" initiative at the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM), which will see the museum focus its exhibitions, conferences, programmes, and other activities on the region from April 2018 to April 2019.

The underlying question ACM will ask is – "What exactly is Southeast Asia?" With ASEAN as a frame, the museum will explore three broad curatorial themes.

First, the idea of a "global Southeast Asia" – a region that played a pivotal rather than peripheral role in global maritime trade and the spread of systems of faith and belief across Asia. This being ACM, the focus, naturally, is on antiquity and the historical, and what new insights they may offer for today. The themes of "Trade" and "Faith" draw reference from Singapore's own essence as a multicultural, multi-faith port city, and trading hub, and thus we "view" Southeast Asia "through the lens of Singapore".

This viewing of the region through a Singaporean "lens" lends itself also to the second theme – colonialism and its impact on a post-colonial Southeast Asia. Singapore did not undergo a violent process of decolonisation. Its own treatment of the colonial past can be considered a kind of tacit assimilation, as compared to extremes of violent suppression some of her neighbours had experienced. In Singapore, we are thus more

able to approach and present colonial history in Southeast Asia with some objective distance and neutrality.

The intent in accounting for colonial history is not, however, to reiterate the horrors and demerits of colonialism – there is plenty of literature on that front. As a museum, our intent is instead to objectively examine – through colonial collections of Southeast Asian heritage – the extent to which the colonial gaze, and colonial methods of collecting, categorising, organising, and presenting knowledge continue to impact the way we consider and conceive Southeast Asia today. In typical ACM fashion, we will pay particular attention to cross-cultural, hybrid "East-West" forms of art, material culture, and ways of representation.

Southeast Asia itself consists of a vast diversity of indigenous and migrant people, cultures, and faiths. A third theme, therefore, pertains to the unabashed celebration of Southeast Asia's cultural heritage. In the course of our "Year of Southeast Asia", the museum shall endeavour to throw light upon cultural diversity, even as we find aspects of cultural commonality. Our explorations will range from north to south, east to west, rural to urban, hill tribe to port city. And we will consider the widest possible range of domains – ritual and tradition, visual arts, craft, architecture, textiles, performing arts, as well as food and other aspects of intangible heritage.

The "Year of Southeast Asia" is book-ended by two major exhibitions that explore the above themes from the perspectives of mainland and maritime Southeast Asia respectively.

In April 2018, we presented *Angkor – Exploring Cambodia's Sacred City*, in collaboration with the Musée national des art asiatiques – Guimet in Paris, and as part of a longstanding Singapore-France cultural co-operation project.

Angkor: Exploring Cambodia's Sacred City, Masterpieces of the Musée national des arts asiatiques – Guimet installed at the Asian Civilisations Museum. Image courtesy of Asian Civilisations Museum.

The exhibition, curated with ACM's cross-cultural mission in mind, places at centre-stage the "East-West" encounter between France and Cambodia in the 19th century.

The first part of the exhibition explores the ways in which Angkor, and Khmer civilisation, were presented to audiences within France and to the rest of the Western world, and features early French photographs, paintings, sketches, architectural plans, books, and plaster casts of Angkor. It suggests that modes of representing Angkor in the colonial era – emphasising adventure, romance, nostalgia, and exoticism – continue to colour how Angkor is perceived and promoted today.

The second part of the exhibition showcases the splendour of Khmer art and the magnificence of the city of Angkor, inscribed as a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) World Heritage site in 1992. Through a selection of Khmer sculpture and architectural elements from the Guimet's collection, we explore the vision, artistry, and technology of the ancient Khmers, and the artistic legacy of the Khmers in mainland Southeast Asia.

In January 2019, we will present *Raffles* in Southeast Asia, in collaboration with the British Museum and other museum partners in the Netherlands, Malaysia, and Indonesia. This exhibition commemorates the bicentennial of the arrival of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles and the British in Singapore. This time we zoom in on maritime Southeast Asia, specifically the islands of the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago.

Angkor: Exploring Cambodia's Sacred City, Masterpieces of the Musée national des arts asiatiques – Guimet installed at the Asian Civilisations Museum. Image courtesy of Asian Civilisations Museum.

The exhibition has three aims. The first is to demystify Raffles, present him as an avid collector of natural and cultural heritage, and explore his influence and legacy on museum collecting in the colonial period and today. The second is to tackle the question of how to re-present, for a contemporary audience, colonial collections of Southeast Asian material that continue to sit at the heart of major museums today, including the ACM. The third, and perhaps most important, is to provide a sweeping history and art history of the cultures of the Malay world.

The core of the exhibition will feature the Raffles Collection from the British Museum – an important collection of mainly Javanese ethnographic material that Raffles personally amassed during his time as Lieutenant-Governor of Java from 1811 – 1815, which he brought back to the United Kingdom. This will be accompanied by a selection of Malaysian and Indonesian material from the Museum of World Cultures in the Netherlands, the National Museum of Indonesia, the Sarawak Museum, as well as from ACM, so one gets a fuller picture of collecting in the Malay world.

In between these exhibitions, ACM will re-open new and refreshed permanent galleries in November 2018. The highlight of the new galleries is our *Ancestors and Rituals* gallery, in which we throw the spotlight on Southeast Asian ethnographic material.

One thing all Southeast Asian cultures share is a devotion to ancestors. Ancestors fulfil three main functions. They provide a social position within the community, act as guardian figures for the living, and bring about fertility for future generations. Many rituals and traditions – particularly funerary rites – are related to honouring ancestors, and the ideas behind ancestor worship and ritual practices are also linked to harvest, rain, and a variety of religious beliefs.

Objects on view, from bronze vessels and wooden sculptures to *kerises* and woven textiles, were meant to be charged with ritual meaning, and thus were produced with great care and artistic skill. Our displays in the gallery aim to marry ritual with art, and provide the visitor with a sense of the complex layers of meaning and artistry behind each and every object.

Elsewhere in the museum, other permanent galleries will be updated such that Southeast Asia features more prominently in each. In our refreshed Maritime Trade galleries, visitors will be able to learn more about the material culture of major Southeast Asian port cities, such as Batavia (Jakarta), Rangoon (Yangon), and Manila, as well as their roles in world trade. In our new "Faith" and "Belief" galleries, the visitor will similarly be able to understand Southeast Asia's important contribution to the development of styles of Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic, and Christian art.

As part of the permanent gallery launches, ACM will also introduce two special in-museum trails. The first is a *Southeast Asia in the World Trail*, in which visitors will be introduced to some two dozen important objects in the museum that highlight Southeast Asia's contribution to global trade and the spread of faith. The second trail will be an *ASEAN* Trail, in which ten objects, representing the tangible cultural heritage of each of the 10 member nations of ASEAN, will be featured.

In the meantime, we will be presenting the more intangible aspects of Southeast Asian heritage and culture in a series of festivals and programmes throughout 2018 and early 2019.

The most important of these is the quarterly Asian Cultural and Music Series (ACMS), which will see traditional Southeast Asian performing arts being featured on ACM's riverfront courtyard, against the backdrop of Singapore's contemporary skyline.

The ACMS represents our museum's commitment to celebrating, presenting, and documenting Asian intangible cultural heritage. The Southeast Asian performing arts groups we feature are required to deliver public talks on the basics of their art-form, and all performances and talks are recorded for use in future museum exhibitions or publications.

The implicit message behind presenting traditional performing arts in a highly urban environment against a contemporary backdrop is that cultural heritage can and must have a place in contemporary economic development in Southeast Asia. It is a most important marker of cultural diversity and identity in the region, even as much of the region becomes urbanised and increasingly generic in outlook.

One year is insufficient time for definite answers to the question of "What is Southeast Asia"; a proper exploration would take generations. One thing is for sure – Southeast Asian identity, rooted in Southeast Asian heritage, is complex, shifting, rich, colourful, exuberant, surprising, and sophisticated.

It is not, for even a moment, simple, straight-forward, or boring. ☐

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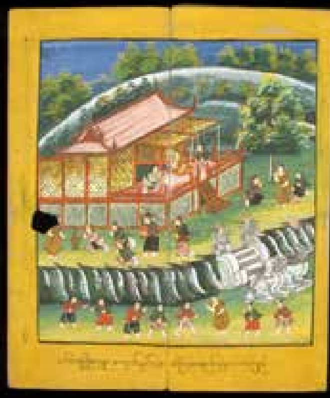
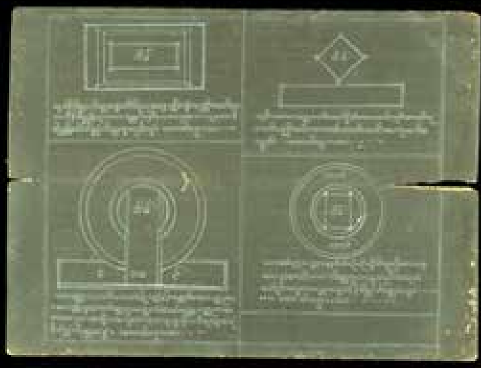

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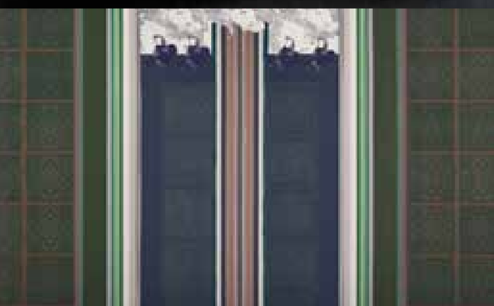

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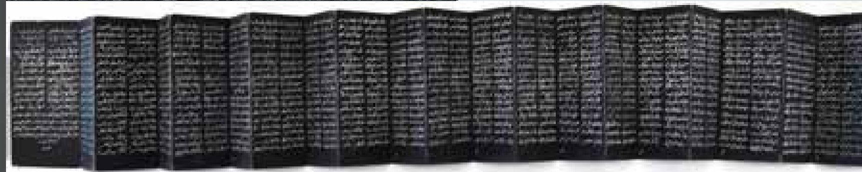

Abdullah from Java: the Ties between Family and History

Louis Ho

Curator,
Singapore Art Museum

Faizal Hamdan, *Dollah Jawa*, 2016, two-channel video projection with a channel on one side showing archival images of the Japanese occupation in Brunei. Image courtesy of Singapore Art Museum

Faizal Hamdan, *Dollah Jawa*, 2016, two-channel video projection with a channel on one side showing archival images of the Japanese occupation in Brunei. Image courtesy of Singapore Art Museum

Bruneian artist Faizal Hamdan's installation, *Dollah Jawa*, was commissioned by the Singapore Art Museum for the 2016 edition of the Singapore Biennale, "An Atlas of Mirrors". The work, a two-channel video installation, emerged from the artist's engagement with his personal family story of displacement and forced exile, a fact that reflects the migratory, cross-cultural character of Southeast Asia itself. The long history of intra-regional peregrination, the arrival of adopted religions and ways of life from China, South Asia and the Middle East, the intervention of the colonial powers and their socio-cultural legacy, the dark years of the Japanese Occupation – the contours of the Southeast Asian narrative foreground the polyglot nature of the region as it exists today, the fractured patchwork of geographical entities crafted from the vicissitudes of history. Even the very nature of the term "Southeast Asia" suggests an externalised locus of understanding: "Viewing the region as lying in the "southeast" involved accepting an image of the world, and of Asia, created in the West. The reason is that "southeast" Asia has meaning only if the long-established European standard of Central Asia as the focal point of Asia is accepted." (Shimizu 2005, 95)

Those convergent historical vectors – the macro and the micro, the historical and the individual

Faizal Hamdan, *Dollah Jawa*, 2016, two-channel video projection with a channel on the other side showing images of old photographs of the artist's family. Image courtesy of Singapore Art Museum

– are materialised in the form of visual images in *Dollah Jawa*. Faizal's grandfather, who hailed from West Java, was one of many Indonesians who were forcefully expatriated to Brunei by the Japanese army to serve the imperial troops during the war. He stayed on after the occupation ended, marrying a local woman and raising a family there. The artist recounts: "As a child, I remember him conversing in Bahasa Melayu, but a version of the language that was inflected differently, or of a different dialect altogether. It sounded different from my grandmother's tongue. I only understood that he was Indonesian when my mother said he was known as "Dollah Jawa" by the locals in the village."[1]

Like dimly remembered figures from the past, or hazy memories of events occluded by dominant historical accounts, images are cast as blurry projections on either side of a screen in Faizal's installation, with the lack of pictorial definition seeming almost to serve as a metaphor for the erosive work of the passage of time. On one side of the screen, old photographs and documents relating to Faizal's grandfather – official portraits, letters, sepia-tinged family snapshots, with some featuring fragments of scribbled notes on the back – bear testament to an ancestral figure who exists only as a vague recollection for the artist today. Featured on the other side are archival images from the Japanese occupation in Brunei, which occurred from 1941 – 45: these include, among others, the photo of the arrival of the Japanese troops in the sultanate; the then Sultan, Ahmad Tajuddin, with members of the occupying forces; an example of the banana currency used during the war years, and the Japanese surrender to the Australians at the end of the war.

The juxtaposition of Faizal's familial biography and Brunei's wartime history represents the conceptual crux of the work. *Dollah Jawa* sits at the intersection of these dual narratives. In the telling of two intertwined tales, it engages, on the one hand, with the neglected history of forced migration in Southeast Asia during the Second World War, and, on the other, with the resultant impact that that episode had on individual lives, which collectively signal broader developments in the trajectory of the region's past. Caught in the tension between the two – the tragedy of history on the one side, and the generative effect it had on Faizal's family on the other – is the unrecorded chronicle of Abdullah from Java, a tale heretofore untold, one weathered, little-seen patch in the quilt of the story of Southeast Asia. ☐

Notes

1. "Dollah" is a diminutive of the name Abdullah, and the toponymic sobriquet suggested his origins in what was then the Dutch East Indies.

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Lime Pot from Cambodia

Asian Civilisations Museum

This brown glazed lime pot has a globular body with incised bands and an applied elephant head.

The elephant formed an important part in Khmer life. It was used as a means of domestic and military transport as well as in elephant fights for entertainment. The presence of lime pots in Khmer ware indicates the Indian tradition of chewing betel nut extended to the Khmer people.

Khmer ceramics have a variety of distinctive forms. However, only two types of glazes were used. One was thin, pale green, usually translucent and finely crazed while the other varied from chestnut brown to olive-green and black and always mottled. Sometimes, these two glazes were used on the same piece.

Excavations show that brown glazed wares were produced by the late 10th century. Khmer ceramics are noted for their simplicity in design. Decoration was used in moderation thus allowing for the beauty of the forms to stand out. ☐

Brown glazed lime pot with incised bands and an applied elephant head from the 11th – 12th centuries, Cambodia. Collection of Asian Civilisations Museum, National Heritage Board.

Affandi, *Burong Hitam, Matahari, Manusia* (Black Bird, Sun, Man)

Melinda Susanto

Assistant Curator,
National Gallery Singapore

Figure 1. Affandi, *Burung Hitam, Matahari, Manusia (Black Bird, Sun, Man)*, 1950, oil on canvas, 169.5 x 84.5 cm, Collection of National Gallery Singapore, © Affandi Foundation

Affandi (1907–1990) was one of many Southeast Asian artists in the 20th century who explored different techniques and subject matters in search of their own forms of artistic expression. In the years following World War II, the push towards decolonisation and growing nationalist sentiments led to the emergence of nation-states across Southeast Asia. The development of modern art in the region was thus linked to these broader contexts in many instances. Some artists made art which reflected or responded to the social and political conditions during this time. For instance, in the years leading up to and beyond the Indonesian proclamation of independence in 1945, Affandi designed posters in support of nationalism.

From the mid-20th century onwards, Affandi came to prominence internationally through his participation in various art exhibitions. A self-taught artist, Affandi's distinctive style came to be seen as a representation of the modern Indonesian identity in art.

Burong Hitam, Matahari, Manusia (Black Bird, Sun, Man) represents a time in the artist's life when he travelled abroad to further his artistic career. He created works along this journey and participated in exhibitions. Between 1949 and 1951, Affandi and his family were in India, where Affandi had received a two-year scholarship to study at the art academy at Santiniketan, a centre of learning established by Rabindranath Tagore (K. Affandi and Soetriyono 2007, 202). Upon Affandi's arrival at Santiniketan, he was recognised as a professional artist. Instead of training at the art academy, he was given his scholarship funds to travel throughout India (Bujono 2007, 12). Through his travels, Affandi would create sketches and make notes based on his observations, some of which would later inform his paintings.

This painting is part of a body of works in Affandi's oeuvre which depict the lives of the destitute and the marginalised in society. Affandi's poignant representations suggest a sympathy for the challenges and harsh realities of everyday life.

In this painting, Affandi depicts a thin, old man carrying a musical instrument. There are more details on the man's face compared to the rest of the figure, bringing our attention to his expression. His wrinkled forehead is a sign of his old age. His eyes are closed serenely, while his mouth is fully open showing his teeth, bar a missing few. It is an enigmatic expression, perhaps a grimace, or a grin – as if the man is weary, yet still full of life and determined to carry on. He is wearing simple clothing and carrying a motley of belongings. Is he a down-on-his-luck musician, wandering around the streets searching for a living? Could this painting be a reflection on humanity's struggles? At the same time, Affandi's depiction of the figure gives him a certain dignity and an aura of strength. The lively strokes and textured surface in *Burong Hitam, Matahari, Manusia* (Black Bird, Sun, Man) are typical of Affandi's style – a result of his application of paint directly from the tube. Rather than use a brush, Affandi refined a technique of using his fingers to create lines on the canvas. This technique was also faster and more intimate, and enabled Affandi to relay his emotions directly onto canvas. Affandi once remarked: "I work as I feel and leave everything to the critics. I try to stir up my emotions, shutting out my brain, and painting by instincts. As I do this I sweat profusely." (*The Straits Times*, 1975). This suggests the act of painting was a highly energetic gesture by the artist.

Affandi often included the motif of a sun in his works, which he saw as a source of energy. In this painting, the sun features prominently in the upper left corner, radiating vibrant blue rays

across a canvas suffused with warm colours. A drawing from 1984 would bear an inscription that expressed his philosophy: "*Matahari hidup saya, dengan tangan saya bekerja, dengan kaki saya maju.*" (Bahasa Indonesia: "The sun is my life, with my hands I work, with my feet I move forward").

Affandi's evocative artworks found resonance across the globe, drawing the attention of art critics. *Burong Hitam, Matahari, Manusia* (Black Bird, Sun, Man) appeared in a positive review of Affandi's 1952 exhibition in the Netherlands (Spanjaard 2007, 21). British art historian and critic Herbert Read deemed Affandi's art "a new expressionism", a term the artist would subsequently reflect upon (Bujono 2007, 10). In his own way, Affandi played a significant cultural role through his art, contributing to growing international recognition of Indonesia as a modern independent nation. From 1951 to 1954, Affandi exhibited in India, Belgium, the Netherlands, France, Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. He also began to represent Indonesia at various international platforms, from the 1953 Sao Paulo exhibition in Brazil, and the 1954 Venice Biennale, to the 1970 Exposition in Osaka (K. Affandi and Soetriyono 2007, 203-205).

Affandi's artistic career was characterised by several significant moments in Singapore. Affandi exhibited in the Singapore Art Society's *Art of Indonesia Today* exhibition in 1955. Hon. Mr. David Marshall (1908-1995), Singapore's first Chief Minister, noted it as the "first officially-sponsored exhibition held by any country in Singapore", as well as the "first representative show of Indonesia's modern art" (Marshall 1955). In 1974, Affandi was one of several artists who represented Indonesia in the first mobile ASEAN art and photography exhibition organised by the ASEAN Permanent Committee on Socio-Cultural Activities. This exhibition aimed to highlight the richness of modern art and photography in the region, and to promote common values through art. It opened in Kuala Lumpur, and subsequently travelled to Singapore, Jakarta, Manila and Bangkok. In the same year, Affandi also became the first Indonesian artist to be conferred the honorary degree of Doctor of Letters from the University of Singapore, for his contributions to art. In 1975, the National Museum of Singapore held an exhibition of Affandi's works. While in Singapore, the artist painted a self-portrait which he subsequently presented as a gift, and it is now part of Singapore's National Collection.

Affandi is one of several modern Indonesian artists who are represented in Singapore's National Collection, reflecting connections between Singapore and Indonesia that have manifested through artistic exchanges and exhibitions over the years. The story behind this painting is a unique one – it was painted by an Indonesian artist, probably inspired by his travels in India, and exhibited in the Netherlands. This painting is, in some ways, a reflection of the mobility of modern Southeast Asian artists in the 20th century. It also hints at connections that remain to be discovered among art centres in Southeast Asia and the rest of the world. ☐

Figure 2. Affandi, *Self-portrait*, 1975, oil on canvas, 130 x 100.5 cm. Gift of the artist, Collection of National Gallery Singapore, © Affandi Foundation.

Burong Hitam, Matahari, Manusia (Black Bird, Sun, Man) is currently on display in Between Declarations and Dreams: Art of Southeast Asia since the 19th century, UOB Southeast Asia Gallery 6, National Gallery Singapore.

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Itinerant Jewellers in Indonesia

Naomi Wang

Assistant Curator, Southeast Asia
Asian Civilisations Museum

Jewellers in Southeast Asia incorporate a myriad of cultural influences in the design and making of jewellery. Part of the lively production flourished under local patronage for a diverse clientele, including the non-aristocratic classes. Made for different functions – from royal regalia to represent the sovereignty of kings, to objects reflective of personal taste – jewellery continues to play a central role as part of the everyday, and is collectively valued across all social strata.

Through 17th century letters of Jesuit missionaries like Francisco Ignacio Alcina, it was apparent that "Europeans were frequently astonished at the way seemingly ordinary Southeast Asians presented themselves with hundreds of dollars' worth of gold on their persons" (Ried 1988, 85). Gold jewellery was in constant demand as it served as a practical means of portable savings and as an indication of wealth and status. Royal capitals and wealthy merchant-aristocrats in particular "established a tradition of gold working which survived the collapse of the royal court, subsequently sending itinerant smiths out to sell or do commissioned work on a temporary basis in newer centres" (Ried 1988, 100). Native jewellers also faced intense competition from immigrant Chinese and Indian artisans who settled throughout the region. The incorporation of foreign styles further entrenched the iconography of hybridised jewellery. The influence of European and Chinese motifs on Malay taste is seen in this group of jewellery.

This necklace (Figure 1) of gold plaques linked by lozenge-shaped chains is a form reminiscent of the traditional *dokoh*, a necklace consisting of

Figure 1. Necklace with crown pendant, gold and diamonds, late 19th or early 20th century length, 39 cm, Indonesia. Gift of Dr Roger and Mrs Betty Mariette, collection of Asian Civilisations Museum, National Heritage Board.

plaques suspended one above the other by chains. *Dokohs* have been worn at Malay weddings by both the bride and bridegroom for over two hundred years. In this example, a crown pendant takes the place of the central plaque. This European-style crown mirrors the one on the Dutch coat-of-arms. Crown motifs were popular in Southeast Asian jewellery by the early 20th century and can be read as symbols of allegiance to the ruling colonial power of the day. Their popularity in the Dutch East Indies is evident from their widespread inclusion in objects such as wayang orang masks, *keris* hilts, and ceremonial headdresses.

The crescent form attached under the crown pendant is seen in jewellery from the Eastern islands of Indonesia, where it can represent sea vessels, buffalo horns, and the crescent moon. The imaginative addition of pomegranate-shaped tassels under the crescent likely alludes to the auspicious significance of pomegranate fruits in Chinese symbolism. Pomegranate fruits are full of seeds, and thus seen as symbolic of fertility and appropriate for weddings.

Aspirational attitudes towards foreign imperial and courtly traditions are seen in the fingernail guard (Figure 2), a popular accessory among women of the Chinese Qing court in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Accompanied by a crown ring, this ensemble is cast in solid gold and studded with diamonds. The use of fingernail guards embodies ideas of genteel upbringing, and is indicative of one's noble status. This fingernail guard's impressive weight, however, distinguishes it from Chinese examples, which are typically made of light filigree work, allowing fingers a high degree of dexterity. The weight of this fingernail guard suggests it was worn only for show, such as when having one's portrait taken.

Figure 2. Fingernail guard (right), late 19th or early 20th century, gold and diamonds, 5 by 4 cm; and ring (left), late 19th or early 20th century, gold and diamonds, length 10 cm, Java, probably Batavia, Indonesia. Gift of Dr Roger and Mrs Betty Mariette, collection of Asian Civilisations Museum, National Heritage Board.

With the advent of photography in the mid-19th century, the increasingly powerful middle class, conscious of their newly attained status, began to drive demand for personal portraits. The wearing of privately commissioned jewellery became part of the process of image-making and a way of displaying status.

Flora and fauna and mythical animals provided a rich source of motifs for local jewellery work. The deer appears on both the finger ornament and brooch, and recalls the appearance of a spotted deer, a species native to East Asia and one that often features in Chinese works of art.

Figure 3. Brooch, gold and diamonds, late 19th or early 20th century, 15.5 by 5 cm, Java, probably Batavia, Indonesia,. Gift of Dr Roger and Mrs Betty Mariette, collection of Asian Civilisations Museum, National Heritage Board.

In Chinese mythology, the deer is associated with immortality and good fortune, as exemplified by their functions as mounts to Shoulao, the god of longevity, and companions to Magu, the goddess of immortality. Set with rose-cut diamonds (*intan*), likely from Kalimantan (Borneo), the similarity in the workmanship of both objects suggests that they were produced by the same maker. Unlike their European counterparts, Indonesian jewellers favoured the heightened individuality of *intan* diamonds over perfectly identical brilliant-cut ones (Richter 2000, 174).

The long gold brooch (Figure 3) is decorated with a row of butterflies and scrolling foliage made of filigree. Called *peniti tak* in Malay, these long brooches were popular among women of various ethnicities in Batavia (the capital of the Dutch East Indies 1619 – 1949 and present today Jakarta) and other parts of Java in the early 20th century, as they were suitable for a *baju panjang* (a long robe with front opening) (Lee 2014, 217). ☐

Figure 4. Seated lady wearing a *baju panjang* with *peniti tak*, 1910s – 1920s, gelatin silver print, photograph by studio Yiet Sing (日升), 10.5 by 14.5 cm, Batavia, Indonesia. Gift of Mr and Mrs Lee Kip Lee, collection of Peranakan Museum, National Heritage Board.

This group of jewellery will be displayed in the Asian Civilisations Museum's upcoming permanent Jewellery Gallery, which will open at the end of 2019.

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Ceremonial Skirt from Laos

Asian Civilisations Museum

This skirt has wide bands of alternating *ikat* and supplementary weft-woven designs in natural dyed silk. The *ikat* employs a "resist dyeing" technique where the threads used for weaving are dyed earlier. The *ikat* threads are bound in a pattern so that the threads covered by the binding "resist" the dye, creating a unique design. The *ikat* designs include pairs of stylised interlocking *naga* or dragons.

The red ground is typical of Tai Khang[1] weaving, whilst Tai Daeng[2] usually employs similar designs of indigo and red bands. The Tai migrated out of southern China into northern areas of mainland Southeast Asia during the 12th century. The rich textile-weaving legacy remains today, although designs and markets for such textiles are changing with globalisation. ☐

Ceremonial skirt from the early 20th century,
Laos. Collection of Asian Civilisations Museum,
National Heritage Board.

Notes

1. The Tai Khang are a minority people group in Laos who speak the Tai Language.
2. The Tai Daeng are an ethnic group of Vietnam and Laos and they speak the Tai Daeng Language.

Ismail Zain, *From There to Now*

Anisha Menon

Assistant Curator,
National Gallery Singapore

Ismail Zain, *From There to Now*, 1986, acrylic on canvas, triptych, 151.5 x 90.5cm (each). Collection of National Gallery Singapore.

Ismail Zain (b. Kedah, 1930-1991) was initially an art educator and later undertook his artistic training at the Slade Academy of Fine Art in London during the early 1960s. Upon his return to Malaysia, he held several posts as an art administrator within the government. Besides practising as an artist, he was an intellectual with important insights into artistic and cultural disciplines including music, theatre and literature. Through his artworks, writings, lectures and the cultural festivals he organised, Ismail Zain displayed his investment in the meanings and implications of the modern. The painting studied here may be considered as a mature manifestation of this inquiry.

From There to Now is one of several paintings executed by Ismail Zain during the 1980s. In this painting, Ismail Zain explores the relationship between surface and pattern, the 'cut and paste' method of incorporating images of popular culture, and the absence of any singular overt meaning, which highlight the artist's preoccupation with notions of 'collage', and 'culture' – consistent themes in his artworks from his studies abroad until his demise.

Collage

'Collage' is manifested in two ways. First, it is literal: as technique and medium. In *From There to Now*, it is seen in the play on depth and positioning of picture planes which serve to avoid flatness and a singularity of field.

Several techniques are present on each canvas, a recurring feature in Ismail Zain's paintings of this decade. Controlled painted stripes delineate space upon the canvas, and held between them are grids of canvas cut-outs collaged onto a larger,

background canvas of photo silkscreened lace-doily motifs and morning glory flowers.

The geometry of form in *From There to Now* links closely to the artist's perceptions of modernism. Its careful symmetrical geometry follows the structural and economical rendering of space present in the artist's drawings and prints from his time at the Slade.

An earlier etching, *Totem* (1964), explores interlays between local and regional cultures through the idea of the monument: a phallic Siva Lingga structure stands atop a semi-circular base, referencing a historical bronze Đông Sơn drum discovered in Klang. Ismail Zain worked on this print at the Slade alongside a peer studying Vladimir Tatlin's unrealised *Monument to the Third International*, and cited this particular moment as one which contributed to a meditation upon geometric shapes and monuments as symbols of modernism.

'Collage' was therefore also a mode of artistic practice: as the consideration of various meanings amalgamating and intersecting on any one picture surface. While forms and motifs might appear as familiar in Ismail Zain's paintings, 'collage' taking the form of a demarcation of the picture surface ruptures any possible reading of the painting as a singular entity. Instead, it draws attention to the formal aspects of images contained within the canvas, prompting a reconsideration of their indexical properties. Here this is achieved with the employment of three separate canvases to reinforce separate planes. While *From There to Now* comprises solely acrylic paint on canvas, plywood strips carved by the artist slice up both subject matter and canvas space in other works of the same period and style.

Culture

From There to Now displays the artist's understanding of 'culture' as the core of his work, and indeed throughout his lifetime, Ismail Zain was involved in cultural sectors of the Malaysian government, holding positions of Director, National Art Gallery of Malaysia (1972-75); Director of Culture, Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports (1975-82); and Director-General of the National Film Development Corporation (1982-1985). In his earlier works, culture manifests as an interest in Malaysia's multicultural histories, and a deep awareness of the Malay identities that these informed. In *From There to Now* and other paintings of the 1980s, subject matter pertained to the impact of mass migration from rural to urban centres on understandings and expressions of Malay culture, which inevitably shifted with the moving populace. Ismail Zain expounded upon what he understood as a specifically "Malay" appreciation of art and culture at the time through the decorative: doilies and tablecloths become stencils which produce repeated patterns in tight symmetrical compositions on his canvases, at times recalling designs of traditional Malay garments. They convey the growing value placed on home and personal adornments within an increasingly affluent Malay population, against a backdrop of mass production and consumerism.

In paintings of this period, Ismail Zain also commented on the conflated identities of Malay/Muslim within the country during this time. To a certain extent, he regarded this as one reverberation of the Malaysian National Cultural Congress of 1971, which decreed that art and culture should foster a strong sense of national identity and unity through the endorsement of indigenous Malay and Islamic aesthetics and

practices. Mundane and commonplace forms encountered in the lifeworld of the 'Malay Malaysian' during the 1980s, such as the floral doily, are presented as alluding to the repeated, non-figurative motif of Islamic aesthetics.

These indexical possibilities intersect and overlap with a further layer of contemporary culture: the recyclability of images and their meanings brought about by new technological feats. Later, embarking on his digital prints, Ismail Zain would state that the computer and what it was capable of producing, and re-producing, could be termed as "culture material". Images could be drawn from their common associations, and as with collage, placed or displaced within new contexts depending on contemporary cultural understandings. Referring to Walter Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936), Ismail Zain illustrated in his artworks that distinctions between artworks and images of mass culture were increasingly unclear. On his canvases of the 1980s, repeated motifs executed using stencil or spray-gun techniques point towards the mass replication of images made possible by printing technologies.

In *From There to Now*, silkscreened photographs of morning glory flowers denote a species commonly encountered across the region. Devoid of colour and triplicated with no explicit connotations, their inclusion adds to the open-endedness of meaning and interpretation, both of which Ismail Zain acknowledged as features and requirements of the modern condition. ☐

This text is informed by conversations with the late artist's wife and estate manager.

From There to Now is currently on display in the UOB Southeast Asia Gallery 13 at National Gallery Singapore.

Iban War Jacket

David Alan Henkel

Curator,
Asian Civilisations Museum

This rare jacket (Figure 1) comes from the interior of the Saribas River basin in eastern Sarawak. It dates to the late 19th century and is made using a combination of both traditional techniques and materials along with imported cotton cloth, thread and glass beads. The use of valuable imported materials marks the jacket as a prized heirloom. The cloth it was tailored from was woven using the *sungkit* technique, a type of warp wrapping in which coloured threads are wound round the warp threads as the cloth is woven. Embellished with powerful symbolic motifs representing ancestors and deities, this most interesting jacket bears a row of seven lozenge-shaped decorations known as *anak buau* (See Figure 2.) along the base of the back of the jacket. These motifs represent curses against the enemy woven into the cloth by the original weaver. Their placement at the back of the jacket suggests that they were meant to guard the wearer against attacks from that quarter.

It is likely that this jacket was originally fashioned as a sleeveless vest meant to be worn in a war party. Warfare and headhunting were an integral part of Iban life. They practised shifting agriculture and different groups were in constant competition for access to suitable territory. The Iban also believed that taking heads brought great benefits to the community because the head was thought to be the seat of life force. After a successful attack the warrior who wore this vest seems to have had it further embellished. The sleeves were added, as were the glass bead fringes. The fitting of a lining of imported trade cotton is another indication that the vest had been used in a successful raid. After conversion the vest would have been worn as a *kelambi* or jacket by the warrior who owned it.

The cotton trade chintz, glass beads and brightly coloured aniline dyed threads used in this jacket would have been obtained through traders from

Figure 1. Iban war jacket, late 19th century, Sarawak. Collection of Asian Civilisations Museum, National Heritage Board.

Figure 2. Detail image showing *anak buau* motif, late 19th century, Sarawak. Collection of Asian Civilisations Museum, National Heritage Board.

the coast. The Iban gathered valuable forest products such as rattan and exotic hardwoods, aromatic woods and resins, beeswax, birds' nests and a host of other items that were valued in markets around the world. They exchanged these products for items which they could not otherwise make or obtain themselves as easily.

Sarawak in the late 19th century was ruled by an English hereditary monarchy established by James Brooke in 1841. The state had close ties with other British colonies in Southeast Asia, particularly Singapore, which was the hub of British activity in the region and had long been established as an important regional entrepôt trading centre. A natural crossroads for trade between the East and West, Singapore became a key player in the regional carrying trade conducted by local traders between the myriad small and medium-sized ports scattered across insular Southeast Asia. Southeast Asian produce was brought to Singapore by traders where it could then be sent on to global markets. Those same traders then often obtained Chinese, Indian and European manufactures which they could sell or trade with in their home countries. These products made their way into the interior where they would have been in high demand due to their comparative quality and cache as imported goods. Objects like this jacket would have been regarded in much the same way as imported goods are still highly regarded today and would have been used and worn on special occasions.

The jacket came to be in the Asian Civilisations Museum's collection by way of the colonial era Raffles Library and Museum in Singapore. It was acquired by purchase from a Mrs St Vincent Bowen Down, the wife of a British expatriate businessman and entrepreneur who was based

mainly in Singapore but who also lived and worked periodically in Sarawak. The Downs seem to have developed a keen interest in the museum and contributed to both the natural history and ethnology collections over the years, appearing regularly in the Raffles Museum's collections records. They also put together a significant collection of ethnological objects, mainly from Sarawak which Mrs Down sold to the museum in 1936 some years after Mr Down passed away. ☐

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Lacquer Stories from Burma: Burmese Lacquerware in Nattukottai Chettiar Families

Nalina Gopal

Curator,
Indian Heritage Centre

Malvika Agarwal

Assistant Curator,
Indian Heritage Centre

Figure 1. A Burmese betel leaf box from a Chettiar household, early to mid 20th century. Collection of Indian Heritage Centre, National Heritage Board

The Burmese Connection

The *Nattukottai Chettiars*, or *Nagarathars* as they were known, were a community of traders and private financiers originating in the Chettinad region of Tamil Nadu (the ancestral homes of the Chettiars are spread across 75 villages east of Madurai and the south of Thanjavur and Thiruchirapalli). Their presence in modern Southeast Asia can be traced back to the 1820s. They settled across Burma (now Myanmar), Vietnam, Singapore, and Malaya during the period of colonial expansion. In Burma, it was the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and the passing of the Burma Land and Revenue Act of 1876, that brought about the first substantial movement of Chettiars into Burma (Turnell 2005). Yangon, Bago, Moulmein, Kyauktan, Kyikkaw, and Rakhine state were some areas they were extant in; temples constructed by the Chettiars in these districts still stand testimony to their presence in the region. By 1936, the Chettiars owned 25 per cent of agricultural land in Burma, up from six per cent in 1930 (Than 2006, 169).

Lacquer for Chettiar Ceremonies

Bright red, untouched, immaculate examples of Burmese lacquerware boxes, containers and trays can be found across Chettiar households even today. These lacquerware boxes, vessels and containers attest to the Nattukottai Chettiars' affluence in Burma during the colonial period. They were given as dower, commonly known as *seedanam* in Tamil, to a Chettiar bride for use in circumstances of need.[1] Interestingly, unused articles like these lacquerware objects would be transferred from one generation to the other, through the female line. Burmese and other Southeast Asian lacquerware (called *maravai* in Tamil), and enamel ware (called *mangu saman* in Tamil) were taken back to India, and incorporated into the traditional Chettiar wedding ceremony as *seedanam*. This is but one example that demonstrates the cross-cultural influences on diasporic communities settled across Southeast Asia.

These traditional Burmese lacquer boxes are constructed with a foundation of fine bamboo splints and horse hair, the latter forming the weft of the basketry (Isaacs and Blurton 2000). This creates a thin walled, flexible and light-weight finished article, even after several coats of lacquer. Betel leaf boxes are one of the most ubiquitous types of Burmese lacquerware. Figure 1 shows an example from a Chettiar household which was probably used as a decorative article. They bear Burmese inscriptions and narratives typical of Burmese lacquerware produced in the late 19th to early 20th century in Bagan.

Certain pieces, such as the *kudam* (water pot) in Figure 2, would have been specially commissioned in the design of a traditional vessel used to carry water in southern Indian custom. In the early 20th century, lacquer finished jackwood and bamboo pots were used by Tamil communities in Myanmar to transport water. These therefore, catered to the southern Indian rather than the Burmese aesthetic, eventually finding place in the Chettiar household.

Figure 2. A *kudam* or lacquer pot, early 20th century. Collection of Indian Heritage Centre, National Heritage Board.

Figure 3. A wooden plate with lacquer finish and gilt embellishment. The reverse of the plate displays ownership initials in Tamil script, reading அ மு or *a mu* and அ ன க ம or *a ṉa ka ma*, possibly originating from Palembang, Indonesia. Collection of Indian Heritage Centre, National Heritage Board.

The Chettiars typically belonged to large joint families, with each branch of the family owning very similar objects of their diasporic heritage. It was important to etch their belongings, valuable or utilitarian, with initials clearly indicating ownership. The style of initialing would also provide a sense of dating. In the case below, Tamil initials have been inscribed on the back of the plate.

After their exit from Burma, mostly between 1948 and 1962, following the Japanese Occupation of Burma, the Land Nationalisation Act of 1948, and Burmese programmes of nationalisation and indigenisation, the Chettiars and other Indian communities repatriated to India, or dispersed to other British colonies in Southeast Asia, including some arrivals in Singapore. While examples in museum collections, such as the lacquerware discussed above, are important relics of the rich and varied diasporic experience of Chettiars in Southeast Asia, objects such as these still have a functional and ritual role in the lives of both source and migrant communities. ☐

The lacquerware mentioned in this article can be viewed at Level 4 of the Indian Heritage Centre's permanent gallery, under the Roots and Routes section.

Notes

1. The dower was given for the bride, in the event that she was widowed, for her financial security. In the event that the dower was unused, as in most cases, it was passed on from generation to generation through the female line.

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Fernando Amorsolo's *Marketplace during the Occupation*

Clarissa Chikiamco

Curator,
National Gallery Singapore

Figure 1. Fernando Amorsolo, *Marketplace during the Occupation*, 1942, oil on canvas, 57 by 82cm. Collection of National Gallery Singapore.

World War II was a painful event globally and its impact was felt no less in the region of Southeast Asia. The Japanese Occupation of several countries in this part of the world led to innumerable instances of rape, torture and killings. While it was obviously a horrifying period, many artists across the region felt compelled to respond – either by painting during the war and documenting what was happening, or reacting in retrospect after the war when there was sufficient time, space and safety to re-engage in artistic practice. Singapore's National Collection encompasses various Southeast Asian works which capture the artists' different responses to a shared historical experience.

Three of these works are by one of the Philippines' most iconic artists of the 20th century, Fernando Amorsolo (1892–1972), who produced journalistic and melodramatic paintings while he was staying in Manila during the war. Galvanised by the events around him, he departed mostly from his usual subject matters of idyllic images of the countryside, such as men and women planting rice, for which he had become well-known.

In 1942, Japanese forces entered Manila, immediately after New Year's Day. Amorsolo intriguingly chose to paint a market scene that first year of the Japanese Occupation (Figure. 1), quite different from the ruins he painted towards the end of the war or his theatrical scene of a male hero stalwartly defending a woman from rape by a Japanese soldier (Figures. 2 and 3). At first glance, *Marketplace during the Occupation* seemingly depicts a typical market scene, with vendors selling fruits and vegetables to interested members of the public. Golden light, which is frequently employed by Amorsolo in painting rural landscapes and cherubic country maidens, ostensibly creates a peaceful mood. Two women standing on the right look at the produce offered.

Figure 2. Fernando Amorsolo, *Liberation Manila in Flames*, 1942, oil on canvas, 50.5 by 66cm. Collection of National Gallery Singapore.

Figure 3. Fernando Amorsolo, *Defend Thy Honour*, 1945, oil on canvas, 91.4 by 153.7cm. Collection of National Gallery Singapore.

The woman with a scarf over her head and carrying a basket looks like the typical demure Filipina whom Amorsolo liked to paint. He often painted these women wearing traditional clothing, portraying a romantic ideal amidst the backdrop of the growing modernisation in the Philippines in the early 20th century.[1]

A closer look at *Marketplace during the Occupation*, however, reveals a stark contrast to the Amorsolo archetype. The female market vendor sitting on the left of the painting deviates from the conventional modest poses Amorsolo nearly always painted women in. The vendor in modern dress is shown with her legs splayed apart. Her too-short skirt rises above her legs, allowing viewers to see her exposed thigh underneath. Within the oeuvre of Amorsolo, such a posture for women is most unusual. Moreover, standing behind this female vendor is a Japanese soldier carrying a rifle. Based on the woman's position and the soldier's presence, it could be conjectured that Amorsolo might have been obliquely responding to the sexual slavery many women were forced into during this period. Alternately, he perhaps meant to reflect the new power dynamics between the Philippines and its then-recent occupier.

Amorsolo also included two Japanese flags in the paintings; one at the banner on the top left and the other on the right. These images of the flags actually have pronounced scratches on them, whereas the rest of the surface of the painting is quite smooth. The scratches are almost certainly intentional but it is also unknown if this was done by Amorsolo himself or someone else, such as previous owners of the painting. Regardless of who abraded it, the scratches reflect a heated sentiment towards a distressing period of the Japanese Occupation.

Marketplace during the Occupation also shows a small crowd at the background, their faces either unseen or indistinct. People are gathered around and seem engrossed in something which is hidden from view. Could the group be gambling? Meeting and conspiring? Or simply looking at particularly interesting goods offered by another vendor? Amorsolo leaves it up to the viewer's speculation.

While having a seemingly placid atmosphere, *Marketplace during the Occupation* holds possibilities for multiple, and potentially deeper, readings. Quite different from Amorsolo's iconic but straightforward vistas or portrayals of beautiful women, this work is a compelling and enigmatic painting from a traumatic time in the Philippines and Southeast Asian history. The painting, together with other artworks from the collection which portray World War II in the region, presents a unique image by which this period can be read and interpreted. ☐

The three works of Amorsolo shown above on World War II can be viewed in the UOB Southeast Asia Gallery 6 at National Gallery Singapore as part of the exhibition, Between Declarations and Dreams: Art of Southeast Asia since the 19th Century.

Notes

1. From 1898 to 1946, the Philippines was a colony of the United States of America, with Americans frequently being the patrons of Amorsolo's bucolic scenes. During World War II, the Japanese occupied the Philippines from 1942 to 1945.

Towards a Shared History: The Hill and the Malay Archipelago

Iskander Mydin

Curatorial Fellow,
National Museum of Singapore

Sharon Lim

Assistant Curator,
National Museum of Singapore

Ninety years ago on Fort Canning Hill in 1928, a group of Chinese workers was reported to have discovered gold jewellery while digging out the roots of a tree during excavation works for the construction of a service reservoir. Described in the press as one of the most interesting archaeological remains in British Malaya, this set of gold jewellery is believed to be from the era of the Majapahit Kingdom 13th to 15th centuries AD. At its peak in the 14th century, the Hindu-Javanese kingdom based in East Java was one of the most powerful empires in the region, encompassing much of Southeast Asia.

The set of gold jewellery (Figure 1) includes a bejewelled pair of earrings, and an armlet which bears a plaque of repoussé work depicting the Javanese *kala*. The *kala* head motif is a protective symbol found at the entrance of Javanese temples dating from the 8th to 14th centuries. The armlet also has flexible chains, some of which were already broken when it was discovered. A statue from West Sumatra made in the mid-14th century shows a king wearing the same kind of jewellery at his waist.

Deposits of gold were customary in prehistoric Javanese burial rituals. They could also be found in the foundations and roofs of Javanese temples. Such practices were likely to be connected with Javanese beliefs in the links between the earthly world and the world of the after-life. At the same time, it was noted that there were no signs of bones or graves buried in the vicinity of the gold jewellery, which was found in a shallow pit at the depth of three metres. This suggests that the jewellery might have been hastily buried to keep them from falling into foreign hands during battle.

It could well have been the case that these pieces were worn by the elite class or rulers of Singapura.

Figure 1. Majapahit-era gold jewellery. Image courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.

Figure 2. Fort Canning Hill seen from the sea, XXXX-01285. Image courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.

Another possible entry point to contextualise the pieces would be the *Sejarah Melayu*, a chronicle of the Malay courts of Singapore and Melaka from the 14th to 16th centuries. According to the *Sejarah Melayu*, the hill was the seat of a kingdom of the Malay kings of Singapore who were descendants of a prince from Palembang in Sumatra. This prince, Sang Nila Utama, established a kingdom in Singapore in 1299, which was inhabited by several different communities and became prosperous through external trade. In addition, archaeologists have found evidence of gold working near the keramat (shrine) Iskandar Shah on the hill. This included small slakes of gold and clay cups for smelting gold, which suggests that the gold jewellery was locally made.

While there has been no definitive evidence to date which could uncover the particular history of why these gold jewellery were buried on the hill, this particular site is an integral part of Singapore's history and its links with the Malay Archipelago.

The hill or Bukit Larangan (Forbidden Hill), as it was known locally, was explored in 1822 by John Crawfurd (1783 – 1868), the second British Resident of Singapore. He found the ruins, such as the foundations of buildings, on the northern and eastern slopes of the hill. In particular, Crawfurd noted a 40-foot-square terrace with a pit and the edges of the terrace had large blocks of sandstone containing a hole in each of them. He surmised that the latter could be the pedestal supports of a former building on the site. Crawfurd's description is significant, especially when the hill was levelled in 1858 with the ruins giving way to the building of an artillery fort, which became known as Fort Canning.

Archaeological excavations of the Fort Canning Hill undertaken in the 1980s and subsequent digs in the vicinity of the Singapore River revealed, with certainty, the extent of the Kingdom of Singapura as an established trading node in the 14th century regional network of ports. In the face

of these discoveries, the terrace that Crawfurd saw in 1822 and the gold jewellery that was uncovered in 1928 still remain as unresolved matters. It may well be that the terrace was the foundation of “a sacral sanctuary” and the structure of the building, a symbol of Mount Meru, the cosmic mountain of Hindu-Buddhist cosmology (Ke 1984, 4). Contextually, the gold jewellery could be used as a reference point to potentially date the terrace, with both relics functioning in the Majapahit realm of influence during the 13th to 14th century.

In retrospect and from a cultural history perspective, these archaeological fragments suggest the possibility of scoping an emergent shared history between Singapore and our neighbours in the Malay Archipelago. While territorial borders serve as distinct markers, cultural interactions can remain fluid encounters as seen in this case of the flow of jewellery styles and ways of building the sacred across the seas. ☐

The Majapahit-era gold jewellery is currently on display in the “Singapura” section of the National Museum of Singapore’s Singapore History Gallery, A-1570A.

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Nipan Oranniwesna, Memories of Progress in Singapore

John Tung

Assistant Curator,
Singapore Art Museum

Born in 1962 in Bangkok, Thai artist Nipan Oranniwesna has become a familiar name to the Singaporean exhibition-goer, having presented two deeply memorable large-scale commissions on the premises of the Singapore Art Museum (SAM). Nipan is an artist who has exhibited internationally, and showed at both the Busan Biennale (2008) and the Thai Pavillion at the 52nd Venice Biennale (2007), in addition to the Singapore Biennale 2013. His detailed research-oriented process of art-making presents his reflections on investigations into locality-bound memories and identities across the region. By oftentimes working across territories and national boundaries, the works by Nipan demonstrate the potential of Southeast Asian contemporary art to foster dialogue and greater inter-cultural understanding.

Hope Brings Us Here, commissioned for the 2013 edition of the Singapore Biennale, 'If the World Changed', was a three-part mixed media installation comprising video and sculpture. Contemplating the proliferation of Thai migrant labour beyond the Kingdom's borders, Nipan embedded historical images of Thai events alongside photographs of the Thai diasporic community at Singapore's Golden Mile Complex within resin 'dewdrops' on the hardwood floor. Visitors were also encouraged to tread across Nipan's hardwood floor to view a two-channel video juxtaposing the Singapore urban landscape against the rural countryside of the Isan province in Thailand. Accompanying these two components was a miniature star – a ubiquitous symbol of progress on numerous crests and flags across the region – which had been moulded by the artist from an amalgam of coins from Singapore and Thailand. *Hope Brings Us Here* questions how one would be able to locate a nationalist identity from abroad, but more importantly, the value of such identities as geopolitical boundaries become increasingly blurred with the progress of economic globalisation and migration in the region.

The search for better economic futures motivates these migrants, yet concurrently, Singapore's economic and infrastructural development has depended largely on migrant labour as well. In coming to Singapore, they bring with them their own cultural distinctiveness, and in forming their own communities on the island, they also create cultural enclaves that eventually become cultural landmarks for Singaporeans and an indelible aspect of our social history.

2017 saw the return of Nipan Oranniwesna to SAM with him working in his iconic format of floor installations for a new commission, *Another Island*, in the exhibition 'Imaginarium: To the Ends of the Earth'. Yet, while *Another Island* bears a physical resemblance to *Hope Brings Us Here*, the conceptual underpinnings of the work had changed considerably – rather than being an investigation into the Thai diaspora in Singapore, *Another Island* focuses on the expanding urbanscape and receding natural landscape of the republic itself. On the floor, the resin bubbles encapsulate photographs of Singapore's cityscapes and nature reserves drawn from archives and taken by Nipan himself. As visitors move close to the ground inspecting each vignette, they encounter recorded sounds: there, sounds from the environment and from people Nipan spoke to on his research trip, whispering stories of this land, whilst simultaneously evoking memories of place and space in the visitor.

Figure 1. Nipan Oranniwesna, *Hope Brings Us Here*, 2013, at Singapore Biennale 2013 "If the World changed", 26 October 2013 – 16 February 2014. Image courtesy of Singapore Art Museum

Figure 2. Nipan Oranniwesna, *Another Island*, 2017, at *Imaginarium: To the Ends of the Earth*, 6 – May 27 August 2017. Image courtesy of Singapore Art Museum.

Nipan Oranniwesna's practice is represented in the National Collection by his work *Let Us Progress Towards…*. Executed in 2009, the delicate set of four hand-pierced paper works is part of a series exploring the ideas of nationalism in relation to the unifying potential of a national anthem. The perforations on the paper form the lyrics to Singapore's national anthem *Majulah Singapura*, in the four official languages of the country, and one can easily imagine the laborious and painstaking process in the making of the work. Thus even though the works of Nipan often exude an air of refined simplicity and tranquillity, to label the processes meditative would be inadequate – the repetitive nature of the tasks in the making of *Let Us Progress Towards…* is more akin to the repeated singing of national anthems by individuals, en masse, regularly as a means of constructing national identities. In this regard, the traces left by Nipan on these sheets of paper can be seen as the confluence point of collective and personal memories.

Figure 3. Nipan Oranniwesna, *Let Us Progress Towards ...*, 2009. Image courtesy of Singapore Art Museum.

In the words of Nipan Oranniwesna, his works "spring from personal moments of contemplation and memories, to be expanded in terms of dialogue with other, surrounding, phenomena." Beyond the examination of archival material, his research process in the making of each work extends into fieldwork where he spends a significant amount of time gathering first-hand experiences of the localities he is interested in. Beyond Singapore itself, Nipan's artistic research has drawn him to numerous countries within the region, including Myanmar and the Philippines. Over the course of each work's presentation, the works continue to take on a greater depth of meaning from the responses elicited by audiences in the territories they are presented in. Rather than merely looking to history alone for answers, Nipan's work positions his viewers within a moment in history for a deeper contemplation of the future in Southeast Asia. ☐

A Rare and Unusual Malay *Parabaik*

Noorashikin binte Zulkifli

Curator (Islamic Art),
Asian Civilisations Museum

A visible marker of the Islamicisation of a culture is when the Arabic script is used to write "the vernacular languages of the new faithful" (Gallop, et al. 2015, 14) – driven largely by the revered status of the Qūr'an as God's Word, which is written in Arabic. The earliest instance of the adoption of the Arabic script was in the case of Farsi, the Persian language, around the 8th or 9th century AD (Gallop, et al. 2015, 14). To graft the Arabic script onto a new language, the original script underwent modification. This typically results in an extension of the alphabet with additional letters that are often modified forms of existing ones. For example, the letter *pe* (Arabic ب with three dots underneath instead) was added to Farsi to capture the 'p' sound.

In Southeast Asia, similar developments occurred wherever Islam had been firmly established, and the most prevalent, well-known form is Jawi: the Malay language rendered in Arabic script. In this case, five letters were added to the original 28 to cover the 'g', 'ny', 'ng', 'ch' and 'p' sounds. These additional letters differ from the Persian modification of Arabic, suggesting that adaptations of the script were often localised. The earliest evidence of Jawi is the inscribed *Batu Bersurat Terengganu* (Terengganu Stone), dated 702 AH (1303 AD). Jawi remained as the main vehicle for the Malay language for well over 600 years, until a mainstream switch to the Romanised alphabet in the mid-20th century. Other regional languages that had employed the Arabic script include Javanese (termed *Pégon*), Bugis/Makassar (*Sérang*), Acehnese, Gayo, Minangkabau, Sundanese, Maguindanao from Mindanao and Cham on mainland Southeast Asia (Gallop, et al. 2015, 14).

An overwhelming majority of surviving Jawi manuscripts in private and public holdings that are known today date from the 19th century. The manuscript featured here from the Asian Civilisations Museum's collection, is dated 15 Ramadan 1250 AH (15 January 1835). What sets this manuscript apart is its concertina or folding-book format as this is not representative of Malay manuscript traditions, which are influenced by Islamic bookbinding practices favouring the codex or book form. Instead, the concertina format is a popular form known as *parabaik* in Myanmar, which is predominantly Buddhist and where the main scripts are based on Indic forms.

On the basis that the folding-book format is more readily encountered in mainland Southeast Asia, Farouk Yahya attributes Malay manuscripts in this format (albeit rare) to the northern Malay states such as Patani, Kelantan, Perlis and Kedah (Yahya 2016, 59). The colophon affirms this as the copyist is named as Bayu bin Dhaman Syah of Patani, and the owner was Fakir Ramli of Burma. Aside from highlighting the cross-pollination of cultural forms (an Islamic writing system on a Buddhist bookbinding format), it is tantalisingly tempting to speculate about the identity of the owner, Fakir Ramli. *Fakir* refers to a Muslim ascetic, but is applied as well to Hindu mendicant monks in India. Perhaps *fakir* has been applied loosely here and Fakir Ramli could have been a non-Muslim monk. If so, it is fascinating to consider the possibility that this text was commissioned for his own study.

Parabaik manuscripts are intended for general use "such as recording business transactions, administrative matters, current events, and rough drafts for palm-leaf copyists" (Fraser-Lu 1994, 288).The paper is coarse and thick, made from the pulp of the *ma-hlaing* mulberry tree (*Brousonettia papyrifera*). Most likely based on the Chinese papermaking method, the mulberry pulp is spread over a canvas frame, then dried as long strips and peeled off the frame. The paper is then either left

Figure 1. An 'uncoloured' Burmese *parabaik* from the mid-1880s featuring illustrations of Buddhist religious and festive occasions. The *parabaik* on the right is of the charcoal-coated or 'black' type and features draughtsman's drawings of buildings and funeral pyres. Collection of the Asian Civilisations Museum, National Heritage Board

in its original colour, or coated with finely ground charcoal that has been boiled in either rice water or mixed with a glue made from animal hides before it is folded down (Figure 1). The manuscript here is of the latter 'black' *parabaik* type. A *kan-gu-zan* (Burmese: white steatite/ soapstone crayon) is used to write on the blackened pages. The charcoal coating allows for mistakes to be rubbed off, and for the entire *parabaik* to be reused by re-coating the pages.

Parabaik pages can measure as large as 85 by 30 cm, or as small as 7.5 by 4 cm, with an average size of 45 by 20 cm. This manuscript falls on the smaller end of the scale, with 20 pages that measure 17 by 9 cm each. Although folded in a concertina format, a Burmese *parabaik* is usually opened two pages at a time (Figure 2 on page 124). Here, the Jawi text is oriented in portrait format, and arranged in two columns of 18 lines. Jawi, like Arabic, is read from right to left, and so, the manuscript begins on the rightmost page when fully extended (Figure 3). The Jawi text is written only on the recto, however, faint traces of previous writing in landscape orientation can be seen on both the manuscript's recto and verso. Further investigation is required before more details of the palimpsest can be furnished.

The Malay *parabaik* is a collection of three *syair*, poems that are usually sung aloud.[1] The first, *Syair Dendang Fatima*h (*Song of Fatimah*), makes up the longest section (15 pages). It begins with supplications and honours the '*ahl al-bayt* (Arabic: People/Family of the House), a Muslim tradition to refer to the family of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The members named here include Fatimah (his daughter), Ali (her husband and the Prophet's cousin), and Hasan and Husayn (her sons/the Prophet's grandsons). Although revered by Sunni Muslims as well, this family carries a special significance for Shi'ite Muslims, pointing

Figure 2. The unusual Malay *parabaik* opens twofold, showing columns of Jawi text. Collection of the Asian Civilisations Museum, National Heritage Board.

to an interesting aspect in the Islamicisation of Sunni-majority Muslim Southeast Asia which exceeds the scope of this article.

Broadly, the *syair* contains advice, exhortations and admonitions directed at a child to grow up to be pious and filial towards her/his parents. Variations of this *syair* exist and it is usually sung to a newborn child as s/he is rocked in a ceremonial cradle that has been elaborately decorated. This is called *adat berendoi* or *adat naik buai* (Malay: roughly, the custom of "ascending the cradle"). *Endoi* means "cradle/swing" in the Perlis Malay dialect. This *adat* forms part of a series of traditional Malay rituals carried out within a baby's first months that are intended for the family to express their gratitude for being blessed with children, and as a symbolic way of providing guidance to the child. The custom continues to be practised today in many parts of the Nusantara (the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago).[2]

The last two *syair* are far shorter, titled *Nasihat Kepada Laki dan Perempuan* (*Advice for Men and Women*, pages 15 to 17) and *Inilah Syair Anak-anak Muda Berkahwin* (*Herewith A Syair for Youths Who Are Marrying*). Like the first *syair*, these poems would fall under the *nasihat* (Malay: advice) genre and serve as didactic texts to guide young people onto the true path, as understood within the Muslim tradition. ☐

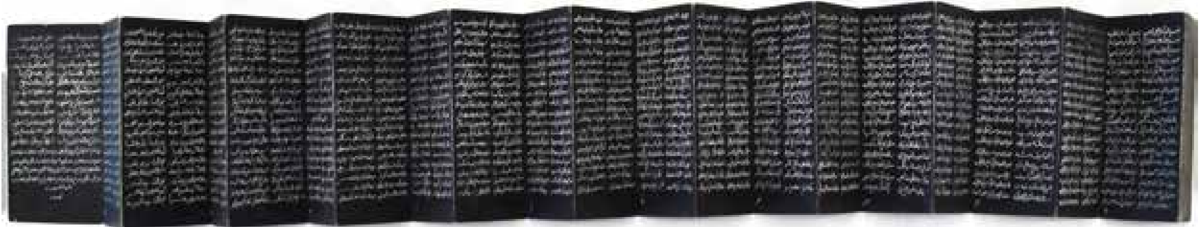

Figure 3. The fully unfolded recto of the Malay *parabaik*. The manuscript is read from right to left. Collection of the Asian Civilisations Museum, National Heritage Board.

This rare and unusual Malay parabaik manuscript will be displayed in the upcoming Islamic art gallery at the Asian Civilisations Museum, scheduled to open at the end of 2018.

Notes

1. A traditional Malay poetry genre, the *syair* is typically composed of a series of quatrains in the rhyming scheme *aaaa*, *bbbb*, *cccc* and so on. What sets it apart from another popular Malay quatrain form known as the *pantun*, is that it carries an idea(s) over, from one stanza to the next. *Syair* can be narrative or didactic, covering diverse subjects from romantic tales to historical events to treatises on religion and philosophy.

2. Nusantara is a compound word in Old Javanese, comprising the terms, *nusa* ('island') and *antara* ('between'). Originally used in an oath, as recorded in the *Pararaton* and *Nagarakertagama* manuscripts, by Gajah Mada, the prime minister/military leader of the Majapahit kingdom, in 1336 AD, *nusantara* then referred to islands outside of Java which he vowed to capture as vassal states for the kingdom.

   In the 20th century, the term was re-introduced to collectively designate the islands of today's Indonesia. Hence, *nusantara*, in its most basic form, is understood as "archipelago" to speakers of the Malay and Indonesian languages. The concept of Nusantara, however, is used in the contemporary sense to refer to the region encompassing the Malay Peninsula, the Indonesian islands, Brunei, southern Philippines and Thailand et al, where the indigenous peoples share a fundamental unity in language, culture and values.

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‘It Doesn’t Pedal Forward, Only Backward! Is It Broken? It Must Be Broken.’ – Reflections on a Forward-Racing World.

Andrea Fam

Assistant Curator,
Singapore Art Museum

From afar, the object's silhouette appears familiar: two wheels, a triangular frame, a pedal. For all intents and purposes the visitor would not be wrong to assume this object is a bicycle – because it is. But more than that, this object is also used to relay an idea for a symbol of productive slowing down – an action that its creator hopes can facilitate a greater awareness of one's surroundings and to hopefully prompt a proactive attempt to act upon this awareness. This object is an essential component of the artwork, *Racing Forward*, and its creator is Vietnamese artist, Tung Mai.

Racing Forward takes the humble bicycle's operation – the pedal motion of its propulsion – as its starting point. Focusing on the bicycle's primary function as a human-powered, pedal-driven mode of transportation, one that continues to impact the world,[1] Tung turns the bicycle on its head and suggests an alternative function for it. Interactive in nature, *Racing Forward* depends on the slow and measured backpedal movement of the visitor to activate the rotation of a hexagonal-shaped lightbox. Affixed to each of the hexagon's six sides are photographs of sights and scenes captured in and around Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam, and Singapore.[2]

There are 12 photographs in total; six photographs overlay another six. The bottom image often obscures the top, thus any effort to study the series of photos requires careful consideration in order to effectively comprehend the artist's suggested narrative; attempt to pedal forward and you hit a preventative-stopper; backpedal too forcefully and the lightbox spins, creating a rotating blur of light; backpedal at just the right pace and you start to discern the faintest tracings of a background image.

The composition of each image pairing in *Racing Forward* combines a scene of 'poor people' (Tung

Figure 1. Tung Mai, *Racing Forward*, 2008-2009, photo installation.
Collection of Singapore Art Museum, National Heritage Board

Figure 2. Tung Mai, *Racing Forward*, 2008-2009, photo installation.
Collection of Singapore Art Museum, National Heritage Board

2009, 105-106), working on the streets of either Ho Chi Minh City or Singapore, with a selection of settings such as a playground scene, a scene with a group of school-going children on their way to or from school, or an image of grains of rice. Inevitably, the viewer will attempt to draw a link between the merged images: what does a cardboard collector have to do with a playground of children? The cardboard collector does not have anything directly to do with those children at the playground. Rather, through informal conversations with the individuals he photographed, the artist realised that the collective dream of so many disenfranchised is strikingly similar: to be afforded the ability to spend time with their children or grandchildren.

> "[...] the virtues of speed are embedded in Singaporeans' national consciousness, as evident from the narrative of Singapore's successful transformation from a sleepy fishing village to a modern metropolis." (Goh 2018)

The photographs included in *Racing Forward* appear to juxtapose Singapore's built-up environment with Ho Chi Minh City's more rural and unspoilt landscape.[3] And whilst the work evidently draws from reflections of the artist's time in both of these cities, it necessitates a broader reading, one that reflects on society at large.

Racing Forward comprises the frame of an old utility bicycle, one that the artist used to cycle to and from school, and which has been modified to only pedal backwards, and a rotating lightbox with the aforementioned series of images. No doubt the artist was drawing comparisons between Ho Chi Minh City, where he was born, raised, and continues to live and work, and Singapore, a country he visited for the first time in 2008, the year this work was made. These comparisons surely contain observations of the differing rates in which each society operated and continues to operate at. And yet what caught the artist's attention most was how two cities that adopt

such different paces of living and operating both contain marginalised communities of individuals that fundamentally yearn for the same thing.

We live in a global age where slowing down in thought and action has now become a highly sought-after skill; no longer are we in a race to become the fastest at everything and anything. We are presently seeking ways to find centredness and mindfulness (Goh 2018) (Iyer 2016). Thus the message put forth 10 years ago in *Racing Forward* – that we need not be racing forward – could have felt almost premonitory. What the concept of this artwork underscores is the artist's wish for global communities to live in a mindful world, one that takes its time to notice its natural and built environment and the narratives that are woven within them.

Is the bicycle broken? No, it just functions differently. ☐

Figure 3. Tung Mai, *Racing Forward*, 2008-2009, photo installation. Collection of Singapore Art Museum, National Heritage Board. Image courtesy of Tung Mai.

Notes

1. Organisations such as World Bicycle Relife for example help provide bicycle transportation aid to countries affected by natural disasters and other devastations.
2. The first time the artist visited Singapore was in 2008 as an assistant to Richard Streitmatter-Tran who was participating in the Singapore Biennale 2008 with his artwork, *September Sweetness*.
3. Even the two photographs that feature the streets of Ho Chi Minh City show indications of a developing city.

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