

The Singapore Story through 60 objects

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As we reflect on the bicentennial of modern Singapore this year, we should not forget another significant milestone in our nation's history: Singapore's achievement of internal self-government in June 1959. This year marks its 60th anniversary.

To commemorate 60 years of self-rule, this graphic spread presents 60 objects from Singapore's various National Collections which, when taken together, provide a sweeping overview of the story of Singapore from the late first millennium, through the colonial period to the present.

The objects presented here are curated along five key sections:

- A) Networks through Time,
- B) Colonial,
- C) Community and Faith,
- D) Art Historical, and
- E) Self-Government and Independence.

The narrative does not follow a simple chronology of key milestones in Singapore's history, but instead opts for a more complex, networked, hybrid approach blending chronology, geography, cultures and major themes.

In choosing the objects to be included, I have been guided by the following criteria: a) that these be objects in collections owned by publicly-funded national institutions in Singapore; b) that these be masterpieces of art, or pieces of historical and socio-cultural significance, with a particular focus on pieces representative of significant collections of objects in public holdings; c) that the graphic spread as a whole is community-inclusive, by which I mean representing all ethnic communities and faiths in Singapore, with a particular effort made in representing the voices of women; d) that the spread be genre-inclusive, by which I mean representing a diverse variety of object types and art genres; e) that the spread places Singapore in the larger global, Asian and Southeast Asian context, emphasising that Singapore, and Singapore's history, does not exist in a vacuum, but has always been open to and impacted by developments in the regional and global spheres; and finally, f) that the objects chosen are on physical display, as far as possible, in the permanent galleries of the institutions from which they come.

This story of Singapore told through 60 objects is thus unique, in that it is global, cross-cultural, multi-faith and inclusive, by which I mean it includes collections beyond the National Collection held by the National Heritage Board and displayed at the National Museums and Art Galleries. The narrative presented here also reaches back further than the now widely-accepted 700-year timeline of Singapore history. The goal of this spread is ultimately to defamiliarise; to allow our readers to see that Singapore history is rich and multi-dimensional, and that as a nation and a people, we possess a wonderful treasure trove in our museums, archives and libraries that we should preserve, cherish and celebrate.

A) Networks through Time

Situated at the midway point between China and India, Southeast Asia has been at the crossroads of maritime trade since the late first millennium. The Tang Shipwreck, excavated off the island of Sumatra, is testament to large-scale intra-Asian maritime trade taking place at least from the 9th century. At the same time, archaeological digs at Fort Canning and around the Singapore River provide evidence that Singapore in the 14th century was already a thriving trading settlement. There are also corroborating accounts in the *Sejarah Melayu* (*The Malay Annals*) of a Kingdom of Singapura paying tribute to the Majapahit Empire.

From the 15th century, Southeast Asia takes centre stage in a global tussle among the European imperial powers to secure a monopoly on spices, and thereafter, on luxury goods from the East, in particular Chinese export porcelain and Indian trade textiles such as those in the (former) Hollander Collection of Indian Trade Cloth. Singapore's heritage as a cosmopolitan, East-West Asian port city has its antecedents in earlier port

cities like Malacca (Melaka), Batavia (Jakarta), Manila, Canton (Guangzhou) and the cities of the former Coromandel Coast (corresponding in geography to today's Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh states), from which these luxury goods from the East were exported to the rest of the world.

Amidst this theatre of trade, war and colonialism came (English) East India Company operative, Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, whose failed bid to secure the island of Java as a British colony became the impetus for his renewed search for a permanent British settlement in the lands (and seas) of the Johor-Riau-Lingga Sultanate.

1 Green Décor Hu Ewer with snake-shaped long handle and dragon head lid, North China, Tang Dynasty (618–907).

Tang Shipwreck Collection,
collection of the Asian Civilisations Museum.

This large ewer is one of the finest ceramics found in the Tang Shipwreck and is the only one of its kind in the world. The incised lozenge motif with leafy fronds is an Iranian design seen on other objects in the wreck, which suggests that much of the cargo was destined for the Middle East. The overall form of the ewer is based on objects made in metal, as is evident from the rim surrounding the base, and the thinness of the handle.

The Tang Shipwreck cargo contains more than 70,000 pieces of ceramics, gold, silver and other items, of which some 55,000 pieces are presently in the National Collection. The ship carrying this cargo was an Arab or Persian dhow; the ship had been built using techniques still used today in the Gulf, particularly in Oman. The collection is cross-cultural in nature, since it consists of a Chinese cargo bound for the Middle East, borne in a Middle Eastern ship that sunk in Southeast Asia, very near Singapore.



2 Inscribed sandstone known as the “Singapore Stone”, Singapore, 10th–14th century.

Collection of the National Museum of Singapore.



When the British arrived in Singapore in 1819, they found relics dating back to the 14th century. One of these was a sandstone boulder at the mouth of the Singapore River, near the present-day Fullerton Hotel. The sandstone monolith was about 3m high and 3m wide, upon which a raised rim enclosed 50 lines of inscriptions on an area 1.5m high and 2.1m wide. It was split into two nearly equal parts, which faced each other at an angle of about 40 degrees. According to the *Sejarah Melayu*, the boulder had been hurled from nearby Fort Canning Hill by a strongman known as Badang.

In 1843, the British blew up the boulder to build military quarters. All that remains in Singapore is the fragment on display here, which is known as the Singapore Stone. Two other fragments were sent to the Calcutta Museum in 1848, but their exact whereabouts are unknown.

The stone has been dated from the 10th to 14th centuries. Scholars have different views on the date and language of the script—the inscription is written in Kawi script and contains some Sanskrit words, but it has never been fully deciphered.

3 Javanese style gold jewellery discovered at Bukit Larangan (Fort Canning Hill), also known as the “Majapahit Gold”, Singapore, 14th century.

Collection of the National Museum of Singapore.



These are Javanese-style gold jewellery found at Bukit Larangan, which is the old name for Fort Canning Hill. The armlet bears a repoussé plaque of the Javanese *kala*, a protective symbol which traditionally adorns the top of main entrances of temples, and is still found in many parts of Indonesia. The armlet also has flexible chains, some of which were already broken when it was discovered. The earrings, each with a socket joint and wire hinge, are set with diamonds.

These were found at Fort Canning Hill in 1928 by labourers excavating for a reservoir. The site engineer recorded that the ornaments were lying just beneath the top of the pre-colonial soil strata, indicating their existence before the British arrived in 1819. The East Javanese style of these solid gold ornaments is a reminder that in the 14th century, the island of Singapore was under the political and cultural ambit of the East Java-based empire of Majapahit.

**4 Celadon dish, Longquan kilns, China,
Yuan Dynasty, 14th century.**

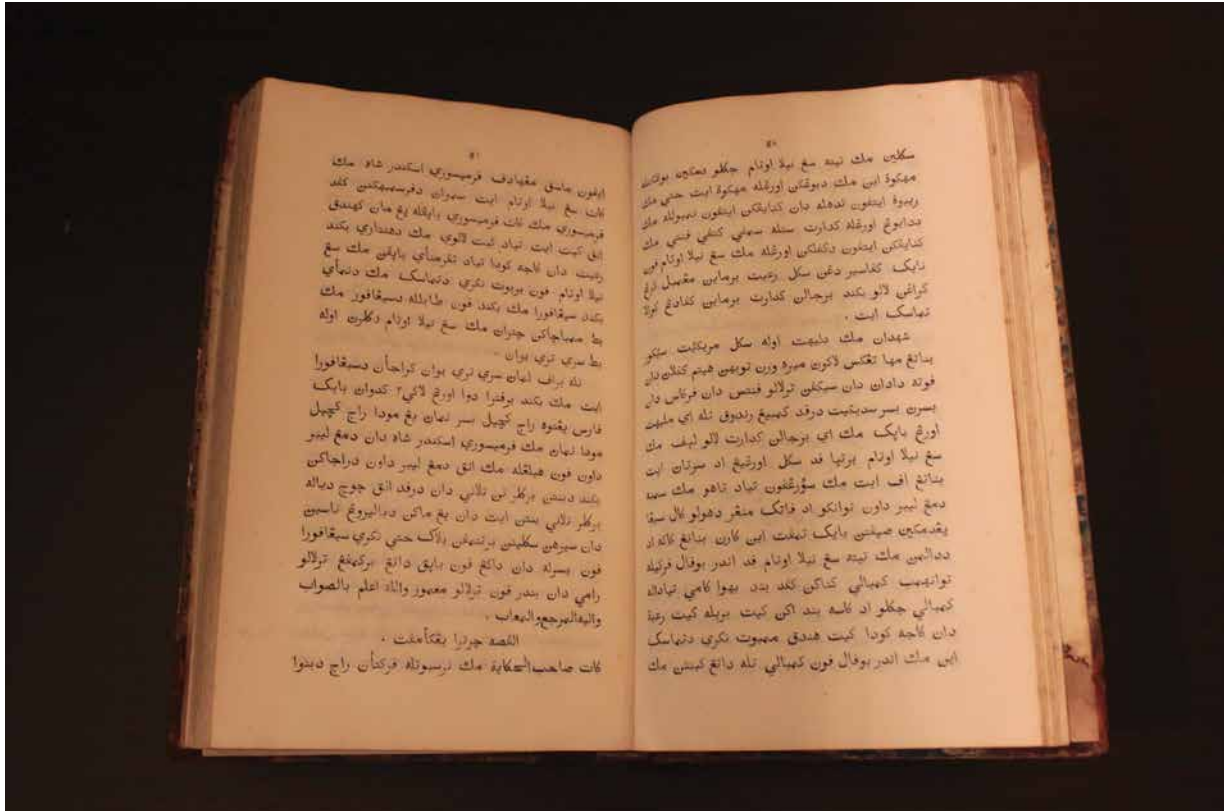
Collection of the National Museum of Singapore.



This celadon dish comes from a 14th century shipwreck discovered at Nipah Island, near the Raffles Lighthouse, in the 1980s. Pieces from the wreck were accessioned into the National Museum of Singapore's collection. The dish provides evidence of 14th century trade taking place in the Singapore Straits, most likely between Yuan China and the Majapahit empire.

Archaeological excavations at Fort Canning in the 1980s, at Empress Place in the 1990s and more recently in 2015 at the Victoria Theatre and Concert Hall, have unearthed thousands of Chinese and other porcelain shards dating back to the Yuan Dynasty (14th century), indicating that the area around the Singapore River and Bukit Larangan already played host to a thriving port settlement, and providing a strong basis for Singapore having a trading history of 700 years.

The Rare Materials Collection,
collection of National Library, Singapore.



Edited by scholar, Munsyi Abdulllah (Abdullah Abdul Kadir) and printed in Singapore in the 19th century (c.1840), *Sejarah Melayu* is the first printed Jawi (Malay in modified Arabic script) version of a 17th century court text, *Sulalat al-Salatin* (Genealogy of Kings). The *Sulalat al-Salatin* has been rated as a paragon of 'good Malay' with its narrative style, vivid and realistic descriptions, liveliness and literary embellishments.

In the preface, Abdullah shared that he wanted to make the text accessible especially to students and 'spread the knowledge of Malay language'. The

Trustees of the Singapore Institution (present-day Raffles Institution), endorsed the printing of the book. Abdullah's text is referred to as the 'short version' amongst scholars as it spans 34 chapters tracing the divine origins of Sang Nila Utama, the rise and fall of the Melaka sultanate, and concluding with the death of Tun Ali Hati, the *Bendahara* of the 4th Melaka Sultanate. It tells of Malay kings who departed from Palembang to Bentan and Singapore before founding Melaka. The pages shown above describe the founding of Singapura by Sang Nila Utama.

6 Tombstone, Malacca, mid-15th century, stone.

Collection of Asian Civilisations Museum.

Melaka in the 15th century, under the reign of the Melaka Sultanate, was the pre-eminent port and trading city in Southeast Asia. Its wealth and power rivalled even distant Venice, so much so that Portuguese explorer, Tomé Pires, noted that “whoever is Lord of Malacca has his hand on the throat of Venice”.

This tombstone dates to the heyday of Melaka’s economic and political power in the pre-colonial period, before its capture by the Portuguese in 1511. It is inscribed with Quranic verses and dedicated to a ship’s captain from Gujarat (in western India), who died in 1459. Gujarati traders were so important to Melaka that one of the four harbour masters was dedicated just to managing their trade. The tombstone was found by British engineers in the walls of the Portuguese fortress in Melaka and were among the first objects accessioned into the collection of Raffles Library and Museum in Singapore.

One of the most significant legacies of Melaka was the adoption of Islam as the state religion and its eventual transmission to almost the entire Malay World. Another important legacy was the codification of laws, ritual and culture, even down to details in dress and language in the Malay world. Following the fall of Melaka to the Portuguese, its last Sultan would flee to Johor-Riau to establish a new Sultanate.



**7 VOC dish, Japan, Arita,
late 17th century, porcelain.**

Collection of Asian Civilisations Museum.



The Portuguese arrived in Asia from 1509 onwards, establishing trading settlements in Goa, Melaka, Macau and Nagasaki. By the mid-1600s, the Dutch would eclipse the Portuguese, taking over Melaka and Nagasaki, and establishing their Eastern headquarters at Batavia (today's Jakarta). The Dutch Vereenigde Oost Indische Compagnie (VOC), or "United East India Company" reigned supreme in Southeast Asia for 200 years until they were challenged by the British East India Company in the early 1800s from their headquarters in Singapore. From Batavia, the VOC would re-export luxury goods from China and Japan, such as this porcelain export-ware dish.

The underglaze-blue decoration of this dish centres on the VOC monogram, which is circled by the long tails of two phoenixes. Alternating panels on the rim of peonies and bamboo are a characteristic of kraakware, the earliest form of Chinese export-ware to be made for the West. Porcelain ware was commissioned from kilns in Arita, Japan, by the VOC in a period where production in China was disrupted by rebellions at the end of the Ming dynasty. These dishes were then exported via the port city of Nagasaki, where they would be taken to Batavia for onward exporting to Europe. Monogrammed dishes such as these were reserved for use by officers of the Company and were therefore not frequently ordered.

8 **Ritual Hanging, Coromandel Coast,
India, early 18th century, cotton; painted
mordant and resist dye.**

The former Hollander Collection of Indian Trade Cloth,
Collection of Asian Civilisations Museum.



Large quantities of Indian textiles produced in various centres in Gujarat, the Deccan and Coromandel Coast were traded across Southeast Asia until the end of the 19th century. They represented strong maritime trade links between India and Southeast Asia, and in this instance, between the port cities of the Coromandel Coast (the coastline of today's Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh states) and Southeast Asia. Alongside these textiles and other goods came people to the port cities of Southeast Asia, including Singapore. The majority of Singapore's historic Indian community came from coastal regions in India and Ceylon (today's Sri Lanka).

Among their functions, Indian trade cloth served as attire for royalty, diplomatic gifts, displays on festive occasions, and clothing for the populace at rites of passage and other ceremonies. These trade cloths had a strong influence on the development

of Southeast Asian textiles. It is believed that local makers began producing cloth, possibly borrowing patterns and motifs from earlier Indian examples, to make up for the shortage of the Indian ones that began to decline in numbers as European nations began producing their own textiles in the 19th century, taking over the global market.

This hanging or canopy is dyed using the mordant and resist dyeing technique on cotton cloth. It features a central motif of a large lotus-like pattern with ribbon, leaves and floral designs. Mordant-dyeing describes a process of using a mordant as a fixing agent to bond the dye to the cloth. Resist-dyeing uses either molten wax or moist mud as resists to prevent the dye from colouring those areas. These two techniques may be used separately or in combination during the dyeing process.

9 Canton “Hong” Bowl, China, c. 1785, porcelain.

Collection of Asian Civilisations Museum.



Porcelain bowls of this type that depict the *hongs* (行) or trading companies of Western merchants at the port city of Canton (today's Guangzhou) were produced by Chinese artisans for export to Western markets by way of Canton. This piece is a fine example that not only vividly conveys the beautiful scene at Canton, but also documents the trade between China and the West during the 18th and 19th centuries.

Canton is important in the history of global trade because for about 100 years between the mid-1700s and mid-1800s, it was the sole source of Chinese luxury goods such as tea, silks, lacquer and porcelain. The Dutch and British established

their ports of Batavia and Singapore in Southeast Asia respectively to take advantage of the Canton trade. These ports functioned as entrepôts for the re-export of Chinese luxury goods to the West.

In 1842, the first Opium War erupted near the port of Canton. In the aftermath and the decades to come, China was forced to sign a series of Unequal Treaties that saw many of its coastal ports—such as Amoy (Xiamen), Foochow (Fuzhou), Shanghai, Hong Kong, and of course, Canton—open up for international trade. It is from these “treaty ports” that Singapore's Chinese population of Hokkiens, Cantonese, Teochew, Hokchiew, Hakka (and others) arrived in the 1800s and 1900s.

10 *The History of Java*, first edition [two volumes],
Thomas Stamford Raffles, London, 1817.

John Bastin Collection, National Library, Singapore.



Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles was a British civil servant and statesman best known for setting up a British trading settlement in Singapore in 1819. After the capture of Java by the British in 1811, Raffles was appointed Lieutenant-Governor of the island, a position he held until 1815. While in Java, Raffles with the help of European and Javanese scholars and informants, whom he did not always acknowledge, commissioned surveys of the island's monumental Hindu-Buddhist monuments, including Borobudur and Prambanan. He also built up a collection of Javanese cultural material such as *wayang kulit* puppets and *gamelan* instruments.

Collecting of these materials was made possible through purchases, acts of gifting and war booty, the latter as a result of the Raffles-sanctioned attack on the Yogyakarta palace in 1812.

Over several months in England, Raffles would organise all the materials he had amassed during his time in Java into a survey and history of the island state, first published in 1817 as *The History of Java*. That same year, in recognition for his work on Java, Raffles was conferred a Knighthood by the Prince Regent (the future King George IV of Great Britain).

B) Colonial

The British settlement and colony of Singapore was established by treaty between Raffles, Sultan Hussein Shah and Temenggong Abdul Rahman. The signing of this treaty resulted in the division of the larger Johor-Riau-Lingga Sultanate, a powerful maritime kingdom, of which Singapore was once part of. William Farquhar, who was appointed as the first Resident, spent more time than Raffles in Singapore, and did more for the fledgling colony in his initial years. Singapore thrived through free trade and drew a cosmopolitan resident population from all across Asia and beyond.

In the course of the century and half that the British were in Singapore and Southeast Asia, they invested in surveying and collecting the region's natural history and cultural heritage, amassing large quantities of artefacts, specimens and drawings that were deposited at the former Raffles Library and Museum (today's National Museum of Singapore), established in 1887. The museum also plays host today to the much older William Farquhar Collection of Natural History Drawings, commissioned by Farquhar himself in the early 1800s.

Southeast Asia during the colonial period of 19th to mid-20th centuries was divided and occupied by various European imperial powers: primarily the British in Singapore, Malaya, Burma (today's Myanmar) and North Borneo; the Dutch in the former Netherlands East Indies (today's Indonesia); the Spanish in the Philippines and the French in the former Indochina (today's Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos). The uneasy tension between colonial power and local agency is captured vividly in signature works of major Southeast Asian artists at the turn of the 19th century. This tension would fuel independence movements in the region post-World War II.

But for the time being, Singapore prospered as the foremost trading port in Southeast Asia. The advent of steam-ship and eventually air travel also established Singapore as a pre-eminent tourism destination in Asia, with the Raffles Hotel symbolising the grandeur and opulence of the East. The 1940s and '50s saw Singapore endure the atrocities of the war, the Japanese Occupation, and the aftermath. It was conferred City status in 1951.

11 Record of the 1819 Treaty of Friendship and Alliance, Singapore, 1841, ink on paper.

Collection of the National Archives of Singapore.



The Treaty of Friendship and Alliance was signed on 6 February 1819 by Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, representing the British East India Company (EIC) and Singapore's Malay rulers, Sultan Hussein and the Temenggong Abdul Rahman. The treaty granted the British EIC the exclusive right to establish a 'factory', or trading post on Singapore island in exchange for monetary compensation and British military protection for the Malay rulers. Singapore's modern legal development has been traced to this treaty which is regarded as the first agreement signed that marked the start of the British era.

Under the terms of the treaty, the British trading post (covering roughly the area from Kampong Glam to Chinatown) would be jointly administered by the British and the Malay rulers. The rest of Singapore and its surrounding islands and waters outside the trading post remained under the sovereign control of the Malay rulers. The treaty's

7th article concerning the administration of local justice noted that the method of doing so would "in a great measure depend on the Laws and Usages of the various tribes who may be expected to settle in the vicinity of the English Factory". The pragmatic concession to balance English practices with local customs set a precedent and became a hallmark of British administration in colonial Singapore.

The treaty was written in English and Jawi with text in both languages presented side by side. The document on display is an 1841 copy of the treaty in English. It is part of the Straits Settlements Records collection originally deposited by the British Colonial Government's Colonial Secretary's Office at the Raffles Museum and Library in 1938. This collection was subsequently transferred to the National Archives of Singapore when the institution was established in 1968.

12 *Portrait of Sir Thomas Stamford Bingley Raffles,
John Adamson, Singapore and England,
1912, oil on canvas.*

Collection of National Museum of Singapore.



This portrait depicts Raffles in the style of a “scholar-gentleman” and administrator. He looks youthful, confident and knowledgeable, and is surrounded by symbols of his scholarly work: the manuscript paper in his hand, a writing desk with paper, ink and quill, and Buddhist sculptures from Java. There is also a romanticised landscape of Java in the background.

The original portrait by George Francis Joseph was made after Raffles returned to England from Java in 1816, where he had been Lieutenant-Governor. In England, Raffles worked on his monumental volume, *The History of Java*. Its publication in 1817 led to him being knighted and the book

was a success in London. The original portrait, commissioned to commemorate his knighthood, hangs today in the National Portrait Gallery in London.

This well-executed copy by John Adamson was commissioned by the colonial government in Singapore and presented for display at the Victoria Memorial Hall in 1912. It hung beside other portraits of individuals important to colonial Singapore. This included a copy of a portrait of Rajah James Brooke—the “White Rajah” of Sarawak, with the original similarly hanging in the National Portrait Gallery in London.

13 **Silver epergne presented to William Farquhar,
Singapore and England, 1824, silver.**

Collection of National Museum of Singapore.



This silver epergne was presented to William Farquhar, the first British Resident of Singapore. It was a parting gift from the Chinese community when he left the island in 1823. The epergne was an ornamental centre piece for the table. It had three branches to hold candles and a centre crystal bowl for fruit. It was made by a famous London silversmith, Rundell, Bridge & Rundell. Such epergnes decorated the dinner tables of well-to-do families in England and signifies Farquhar's popularity with the Asian communities in Singapore in the 1820s.

Farquhar was summarily dismissed by Raffles in 1824 following disagreements as to how the fledgling colony of Singapore was administered. He is today recognised as having had an extremely significant role in the founding and initial administration of the colony.

14 'Plan of the Town of Singapore', also known as the "Jackson Plan", Singapore, 1828, lithograph.

Collection of the National Museum of Singapore.



This is a lithograph of the original steel engraving published in 1828, which was prepared by Lieutenant Philip Jackson based on the plan that he drew up in 1822. Under Jackson's plan, the different migrant communities in Singapore—such as the Europeans, Chinese, Indians, Arabs and Bugis—were placed in separate ethnic enclaves. However, the various ethnic enclaves were never very strictly segregated. Muslim mosques and Hindu temples were constructed in Chinatown, while Kampong Bugis had become Kampong Java by the 1830s.

This print was published in John Crawfurd's *Journal of an Embassy to the Courts of Siam and Cochinchina* in 1828. John Crawfurd followed William Farquhar as the second (and final) British Resident of Singapore. After Crawfurd, the position of Resident was replaced with that of the Governor of the Straits Settlements, as Singapore, Melaka and Penang were grouped together to form the Straits Settlements from 1826.

15 *The Esplanade from Scandal Point,*
John Turnbull Thomson, Singapore,
1851, oil on canvas.

Collection of the National Museum of Singapore.



This is an oil painting by John Turnbull Thomson, who served as the first government surveyor in Singapore from 1841 to 1853. A self-trained artist, he produced a number of paintings which have become an important record of the early settlement.

This painting shows a view of the Padang (open square or field) from Scandal Point, the Saluting Battery (a small knoll above the original shoreline since levelled) situated at the edge of Connaught Drive, southeast of St. Andrew's Church (St. Andrew's Cathedral today). The Padang was the

heart of social life in 19th century Singapore and is depicted here in its most bustling state in the late afternoon with different communities dressed in their respective costumes.

The painting creates the impression that Singapore was an idyllic multicultural society. However, the representation of Europeans on an elevated plane—on horseback or in horse-drawn carriages—while Asians are either standing or seated on the field, subtly suggests that it was the Europeans who held the authority in the settlement.

16 *Portrait of Sir Frank Athelstane Swettenham,
John Singer Sargent, Singapore, Malaysia,
England, 1904.*

Collection of the National Museum of Singapore.



John Singer Sargent was the most celebrated portraitist of his time. This portrait, commissioned by the Straits Association, commemorated Sir Frank Swettenham's long service as Resident-General of the Federated Malay States and Governor of the Straits Settlements.

Swettenham is portrayed as a strong leader exuding power and authority. He is dressed in an immaculate white uniform and stood beside a gilded armchair covered in Malay silk brocade. Visible above him, on the left, is the lower half of a globe on a gilt stand, showing a segment of the Malay States.

17 **Black-capped Kingfisher, Malacca,
early 19th century, watercolour on paper.**

William Farquhar Collection of Natural History Drawings,
gift of G. K. Goh, collection of National Museum of Singapore.



The William Farquhar Collection of Natural History Drawings consists of 477 watercolours of flora and fauna indigenous to Malacca, Singapore and the Malayan Peninsula. It was commissioned by Major William Farquhar between 1819 and 1823, when he was the first Resident of Singapore.

This extensive collection is one of a kind in the environmental history of the Malay peninsula during the early 1800s. The drawings were designed to be scientifically accurate, with each of the drawings sporting the scientific name of the specimen depicted, alongside the common name in Jawi Malay and English. It is generally accepted

that they were painted by Chinese artists of the Canton school of export painting. The collection had been handed down in its entirety to the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland. It was put up for auction in 1993, and acquired by Singaporean benefactor, Goh Geok Khim, who then donated it to the National Museum of Singapore.

The black-capped kingfisher is depicted with its wings fully spread, about to land or take off from the branch it sits on. It is a common bird in Singapore, often first observed as a quick flash of blue diving into Singapore's waterways for a meal.

18 **Juvenile Malayan Tapir gaining adult colours**
(*Tapirus Indicus*), Sumatra, collected 1913,
photo by Tan Heok Hui.

The former Raffles Library and Museum Natural History Collection,
collection of Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum.



The Raffles Library and Museum Collection consists of historical documents, natural history specimens and objects amassed during the colonial period and held at the former Raffles Library and Museum (today's National Museum of Singapore). In the course of 1970s to the 1990s, the former Raffles Library and Museum Collection was split, with the natural history collection going to the present-day Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum, the Southeast Asian ethnographic collection going to the present-day Asian Civilisations Museum, the art collection going to the Singapore Art Museum, and the historical and documentary collection going to the National Archives of Singapore and the present-day National Museum of Singapore. The intent of splitting the collection at the time was because the Singapore Government wished the National Museum of Singapore to function as a social history museum highlighting Singapore's history and multi-cultural fabric.

This juvenile Malayan Tapir was captured just as it was about to take on its adult colours, which explains a faint black and white layer over the typical spotted pelt of the tapir's young. The scientific name *Tapirus indicus* Desmarest was given to the Malayan Tapir in September 1819, just months after modern Singapore's founding. In the earlier part of the 19th century, Raffles and Farquhar were fighting over the credit for discovering the tapir. Raffles even went as far as to try to block Farquhar's account of the tapir from being published.

Unfortunately, back in 1818, Raffles had hired French naturalists to collect specimens for him. At some point, one of the naturalists, Desmarest copied and sent parts of Farquhar's as yet unpublished account to the renowned French zoologist Georges-Frédéric Cuvier. Using this plagiarised information, Cuvier published a short account of the tapir in March 1819. Using Cuvier's account, Desmarest then also published his own account, but goes a step further to coin a scientific name for the tapir, adding his name "Desmarest" to it for posterity.

19 **Kris, Palembang, Sumatra, 19th century,**
***suasa*, wood, copper, gold.**

The former Raffles Library and Museum Ethnographic Collection,
collection of Asian Civilisations Museum.

Krises have deep symbolic and ritual meaning in Malay and Indonesian culture. A kris' blade is typically wavy, and the number of waves can range from three to more than thirty. Given the pre-Islamic roots of the kris itself, it is widely believed that the wavy form of the blade resembles that of a *naga*, or snake, in Malay-Javanese mythology.

The kris' hilt is the means by which one determines the style of the kris. Malay, Bugis and Sumatran kris often sport far more stylised and abstract hilts, recalling the form of deities and demons but without the features. This kris from the Raffles Library and Museum Ethnographic Collection comes from the city of Palembang in Sumatra. Old museum records say it once belonged to Sultan Pengeran Syed Ali of Palembang.

The wavy blade is made from *suasa*, an alloy of copper, silver and gold. The image of a lion near the hilt is a symbol of power and royalty. The hilt and copper finger guard were probably later additions to the weapon. The kris entered the Raffles Library and Museum in 1912 and is part of a larger and significant collection of kris from the region, mostly collected during the colonial period. The presence of a large kris collection also reminds visitors that Singapore has always been a part of the region and continues to have strong cultural links to its immediate neighbours Malaysia and Indonesia.



***Boschbrand (Forest Fire)*, Raden Saleh,
Indonesia, 1849, oil on canvas.**

Collection of National Gallery Singapore.

This work of art has been adopted by the
Yong Hon Kong Foundation.



Raden Saleh (1807 or 1811–1880) is regarded as one of the most important 19th century artists from Java. Hailed as the “father of modern Indonesian painting”, he is known for his Orientalist landscape and animal hunt paintings that are full of energy and emotion. He was born in Semarang to an aristocratic Javanese family and grew up in a very privileged household. Later, he would move to Europe, where he continued to perfect his art and where he attracted patronage from the European elite.

Forest Fire is an immense composition showing animals chased by flames to the edge of a precipice. This relentless and tragic tale of life and death is powerfully narrated through the vivid depiction of the animals and the dramatic use of light and

dark on a monumental scale. Painted during the last years of Raden Saleh’s long sojourn in Europe, and the largest known example of the artist’s oeuvre, the work manifests his technical mastery of the oil medium, realism, and the language of European Romanticism. The painting was gifted by Raden Saleh to King Willem III of the Netherlands. Just a year earlier in 1848, the king had bestowed the title of “Schilder des Konings” (‘King’s Painter’) upon him.

Contemporary readings of Raden Saleh’s oeuvre tend to point out the uneasy tension between his being Javanese, and his specialising in painting what are essentially romanticised European imaginings of Asian landscapes.

21 *España y Filipinas (Spain and the Philippines),*
Juan Luna, the Philippines, 1884, oil on canvas.

Collection of National Gallery Singapore.

Juan Luna (1857–1899) was born in Badoc, the Philippines. He began his studies in art practice in Manila but moved to Europe later to further his practice. During his lifetime, the Philippines was wrecked by revolution and struggles for independence from Spain. Luna himself would fight for Philippine independence in his later years.

España y Filipinas is an allegorical painting, using two female figures to represent the colonial relationship between Spain and the Philippines. Juan Luna was an accomplished academic painter, and this painting shows his mastery of 19th century visual conventions. The work was painted at the height of Luna's career, following public acclaim for his monumental canvas, *Spoliarium*. There are multiple versions of this painting, with this version having been made for Luna's friend, the nationalist intellectual Pedro Paterno. While Spain is clearly the dominant figure, shown as guiding the Philippines and pointing to the way forward, the two figures are nonetheless relatively similar in stature and dignity, suggesting that the composition is intended to represent a benevolent and idealised image of the colonial project. The work therefore represents the reformist aspirations of certain 19th century Filipino intellectuals towards a more equitable and less exploitative colonial relationship with Spain. A later allegory by Luna on the same subject—inspired by the Paterno version—was commissioned by the Spanish Ministry of Overseas Affairs and shown at the 888 Universal Exposition in Barcelona, indicating that the artwork also played an active public role in colonial propaganda.



22 *Harmony in Green: The Two Sisters, Lê Phổ, Vietnam, 1938, gouache on silk.*

Collection of National Gallery Singapore.



Born in Hanoi, Lê Phổ (b.1907), considered one of the masters of 20th century Vietnamese painting, was among the first batch of students who graduated from Ecole des Beaux Arts de l'Indochine in 1930. The Ecole, founded by French painter Victor Tardieu, encouraged its students to explore Western techniques of painting while experimenting with local Vietnamese materials such as silk and lacquer. In 1937, Lê Phổ moved to Paris and held his first solo exhibition there the following year. He stayed on in the city until his death in 2001.

Lê Phổ was best known for his refined and elegant portraits of Vietnamese women, often stylised in an elongated manner. This painting of two women is a prime example of Lê Phổ's art, showing an appealing synthesis of East and West. By the end of the 1930s, Lê Phổ had travelled in both China and Europe, absorbing different cultural influences. Among the European painters he viewed, Lê Phổ preferred artists of the mediaeval and early Renaissance periods, whose delicate, linear style is reflected in the treatment of the figures in *Harmony in Green*. The draped scarves, which trail around the figures, may show the impact of Tang court paintings. The use of the silk material as a painting surface allowed the artist to create a soft, luminous colour harmony.

23 Raffles Hotel uniform top, Singapore, 1930s.

Collection of the National Museum of Singapore.



The Raffles Hotel began life as a large old bungalow known as Beach House in the early 1830s, built by Robert Scott. Over the years, Beach House was leased out to families and changed ownership several times before the lease was acquired by the Sarkies Brothers in September 1887. The Sarkies Brothers were Armenians with roots in the Persian city of Isfahan (in present-day Iran). They had made their way to the East Indies (Southeast Asia) via the city of Calcutta (today's Kolkata) in then-British India.

Raffles Hotel opened its doors for operations on 1 December 1887. Under the Sarkies, Raffles Hotel grew into a grand oriental hotel, with new buildings added to accommodate rising demand for luxury

travel. By the 1910s, the Sarkies Brothers were at the pinnacle of their success, having established some of the most profitable and successful hotels in Southeast Asia, including the Eastern & Oriental Hotel in Penang and the Strand Hotel in Yangon.

Over time, the hotel consistently improved with the use of modern systems and needs (such as an elevator, tennis lawn etc). This uniform top which has the word "ROOM" sewn on the left side, would have been worn by a room service staff at the hotel in the colonial days, judging from the buttons on the uniform which has the words "Raffles Hotel, Malaya" engraved on them.

24 **Changi Prison cell door,
Singapore, 1930s, metal.**

Collection of the National Museum of Singapore.



Changi Prison was built in the 1930s as a civilian prison for a few hundred prisoners. It was the last prison built by the British colonial government, and is best known for being an internment camp during World War II. During the Japanese Occupation, the prison became overcrowded. The Japanese used the prison, which was built to house only 600 prisoners, to intern a few thousand combatant and civilian prisoners of war. Governor Shenton Thomas and his wife, Lady Daisy Thomas, were among the internees held there.

The prison was also known for being the site where many trade unionists, suspected communists and political prisoners were held in the 1950s and 1960s following riots and civil unrest in the decade leading up to Singapore's independence. Most of the prison, except for the 180-metre stretch of wall, two turrets and the entrance gate, were demolished in 2004 to make way for a new Changi Prison Complex. The wall, turrets and entrance gate were gazetted as a national monument in 2016.

**25 The Mace of the City of Singapore,
Singapore, 1953, gold.**

Collection of the National Museum of Singapore.

Prominent Chinese philanthropist Loke Wan Tho, founder of Cathay Organisation, presented this mace to the city of Singapore. The occasion was the granting of city status to Singapore by King George VI in 1951. The mace was made by Messrs Hamilton & Inches, Goldsmiths of Edinburgh, and designed by British sculptor Charles d'Orville Pilkington Jackson.

The design motifs were suggested by a committee consisting of Loke, university professors, and the staff of Raffles Library and Museum, which later became the National Museum of Singapore. The silver figures of a Chinese, Malay, Indian and European, linked by a garland of flowers, symbolise Singapore's multi-ethnic population. They stand atop a castle bearing the city's arms. Other motifs reference Singapore's ecology, culture and trade. Completed in 1953, the mace combines both ornamentation and political symbolism with the aim of creating a new sense of loyalty and pride for the people of Singapore at that time.



C) Community & Faith

Multi-culturalism is a core facet of Singaporean identity and society. As a pre-eminent trading port in Southeast Asia, Singapore attracted, in the course of its history, ethnic and religious communities from all over Asia and Europe. Aside from the Malay, Chinese, Indian, Eurasian and various Peranakan communities—these ethnicities being themselves convenient amalgamations of many different sub-ethnicities—Singapore also welcomed Arabs, Jews, Armenians and Europeans.

Another important core facet of Singaporean identity and society is religious harmony, with Singapore being the most religiously diverse nation in the world. Singapore's Inter-religious Organisation today recognises 10 world religions in Singapore—the Baha'i faith, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Sikhism, Taoism and Zoroastrianism.

This section attempts to capture and present the cultural and religious diversity of Singapore, with all ethnicities and faiths represented as far as possible. Alongside masterpieces of sacred art, material culture features strongly, with film culture being represented by the Cathay-Keris Malay Classics Collection, which was inscribed into the UNESCO Memory of the World Asia-Pacific Register (2014). In the spirit of inclusiveness, particular effort has also been made to feature the stories of women in the community.

26 Betel box, Riau-Lingga archipelago,
mid-19th century, leather, lacquer, gold.

Collection of Asian Civilisations Museum.



The custom of chewing *sirih*, or betel, is an ancient one. It is widespread in Asia, with almost all countries of South and Southeast Asia having once practised or still practising this custom regularly. The word *sirih* refers to the betel leaf, which is chewed with the *pinang*, or areca nut. Slices of *pinang* are folded carefully in a *sirih* and enhanced in flavour with cloves, slaked lime and occasionally tobacco. The quid is then popped into one's mouth and chewed.

The different parts of the *sirih*—lead, nut, spice, lime and tobacco—were often housed in an elaborate container such as this one. The distinctive shape of this betel container (*kotak sirih*) is typical of the form. One of such containers is presented as part of the gifts in the proposal ceremony, or as part of the gift exchange between bride and groom

that kicks off wedding proceedings. The technique of tooling thin slivers of gold onto leather mimics the traditional technique of gold embroidery on velvet. The box is decorated with panels of scrolling leaves and flowers, a pattern known as the *sulur bayung* arrangement. The neatly ordered composition of leaves that curl in signifies ideals of humility and modesty.

Old museum records attribute the red leather *sirih* box as having been purchased from Tungku Aisa binti Tungku Yahaia Lingga from Sultan Gate, Singapore, in 1938. This means that the betel container once belonged to a princess of the Johor-Riau-Lingga royal family, who had resided in the vicinity of Istana Kampung Gelam (today's Malay Heritage Centre).

27 ***Cheongsam* that belonged to Singapore's war heroine, Elizabeth Choy, Singapore, 1953.**

Collection of National Museum of Singapore,
gift of Elizabeth Choy.

This *cheongsam* with elegant floral prints was worn by Singapore's World War II heroine, the late Elizabeth Choy, when she attended Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's coronation on 2 June 1953 in England. Choy endured torture following her arrest in 1943 by the Japanese *kempeitai* (military police) on suspicion of aiding the British. She was detained at the former YMCA at Orchard Road, and finally released after 200 days. The clothes she wore during her detention have also been donated to the National Museum of Singapore.

The *cheongsam* was the favoured formal dress of Elizabeth Choy. As a mode of dress for Chinese women, it was popularised in Shanghai during the 1920s and '30s, when the city was an influential fashion capital. Then, the *cheongsam* itself was the standard dress for many Chinese women in China's cities, as well as in the cities with large Chinese communities such as Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore. In style, it is believed to have evolved from a long robe worn by Manchu women during the Qing dynasty in China.

The easy availability of *cheongsams* from Cantonese and Shanghainese tailors in Singapore contributed to the popularity of the dress here, with most working women in Singapore having at least one *cheongsam* in the 1950s and '60s. Many working women adopted the *cheongsam* as their work attire because it projected modern and progressive values that they subscribed to as modern women.



Chettiar marriage necklace
 (*Thali / Kazhuththu Uru*), Chettinad, Tamil Nadu, South India, 19th century.

Collection of Asian Civilisations Museum.



The Chettiars are a South Indian community in Singapore originating from Chettinad in Tamil Nadu. They are usually referred to as 'Nattukottai Chettiars' to distinguish them from other groups of Chettiars. The term "chettiar" is a caste label referring to "merchant", and the Chettiars were traditionally merchants and traders in precious stones. They later moved into banking and moneylending activities. Their presence as financiers in Southeast Asia grew with the expansion of British colonialism. Many Chettiars emigrated from India to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), Burma (now Myanmar) and Malaya (now Malaysia and Singapore).

The early Chettiar immigrants to Singapore contributed much to the economic development of the thriving settlement by providing credit and banking services. The majority of them

operated their businesses from the shophouses situated along Market Street.

This large-sized *thali* (marriage necklace) is used exclusively by the Nagarathar Chettiar community of Tamil Nadu. This type of necklaces usually comprises 35 pieces and are strung by 21 lengths of twisted strings smeared with turmeric. The central pendant, also called *ethanam*, has four sharp spikes representing the four *vedas* (knowledge). This is surmounted by an image of Subrahmanya standing with his parents, Shiva and Parvati, who are seated on a *nandi* (bull). In weddings, the groom would tie this necklace around the bride's neck after the exchange of vows. The *kazhuththu uru* is a ceremonial *thali* that is worn during the wedding and special occasions, such as for the celebration of the husband's 60th birthday.

29a *Kebaya*, Straits Settlements and Indonesian Archipelago, late 19th–early 20th century.

Collection of the Peranakan Museum,
gift of Mr and Mrs Lee Kip Lee.



The *sarong kebaya* (29a) was the fashionable dress of Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore. While it is most often associated with Nyonya women today, it was prevalently worn by women of all ethnicities in the early to mid-1900s. This item comprises two individual pieces.

The *kebaya* is an open tunic with long sleeves, a collarless neck and front opening. It is a hip-length garment and is gently shaped to flatter the figure. It is fastened in the front by a set of three leaf-shaped or jewelled brooches (*kerosang*), usually connected by a chain. This *kebaya* is made from white translucent voile and decorated with lace, which is sewn onto the edges of the plain fabric. Such forms of *kebayas* were commonly worn from the 1920s onwards among Nyonyas in the Straits Settlements.

29b

*Sarong Lien Metzelaar, Java,
Indonesia, late 19th–early 20th century.*

Collection of the Peranakan Museum.



Eurasian women in the Dutch East Indies were perhaps the first to wear white cotton *kebaya*s trimmed with handmade European lace in the day. Being of a translucent material, this garment would have been worn with an inner, possibly long-sleeved undershirt.

The *sarong* (29b) is wrapped around the waist and functions as a skirt. This *kain sarong* (sarong cloth) features an array of motifs which includes humans, fans, flowers and umbrellas. It is made of *Batik Belanda* or *batik* made by the Dutch Eurasians in Indonesia. The maker of the *batik* was Lien Metzelaar, a young Dutch Eurasian lady whose atelier was active in the city of Pekalongan between 1880 to 1920. *Metzelaar batik* is distinguished by a signature motif of seven leaves on a straight branch alternating with four flowers on the border of the *kain*.

**Production still, *Sumpah Pontianak*
(1958, Cathay-Keris Films), directed by B.N. Rao.**

Courtesy of Asian Film Archive and Wong Han Min.



Pontianak (1957) by Cathay-Keris marked the birth of Malay horror films as a genre during the golden era of Singapore cinema. The first multi-lingual film, *Pontianak*, was initially released in both Bahasa Melayu and Mandarin, and later dubbed into Cantonese and English for overseas audiences. Its success at the box office inspired the creation of many other horror films about other figures from Malay mythology. *Pontianak*, of which no existing films has been found as yet, was followed by two equally successful sequels, *Dendam Pontianak* (*Revenge of the Pontianak*) in 1957 and *Sumpah Pontianak* (*Curse of the Pontianak*) in 1958. As the first two films are regarded to be lost, the production still featured here comes from *Sumpah Pontianak*.

The *Pontianak* trilogy was also a cross-cultural production. The Cathay-Keris film studio was founded and helmed by Chinese business magnate and philanthropist Loke Wan Tho and Chinese

Managing Director Ho Ah Loke; the films were directed by successful Indian film director, Balakrishna Narayana Rao, or B. N. Rao, and starred movie star Maria Menado. Menado's real name was Liesbet Dotulong and she was an extremely popular actress in Malaya and Singapore in the 1950s and '60s. Her role in the *Pontianak* trilogy catapulted her to fame.

The surviving 91 films of the Cathay-Keris Malay Classics Collection have been preserved by the Asian Film Archive since 2007. This collection was successfully inscribed by the Asian Film Archive's nomination into UNESCO's Memory of the World Asia-Pacific Register in 2014 and is currently the only Singapore inscription in the Memory of the World Register. The Memory of the World Register is the UNESCO World Heritage Site equivalent for documentary heritage.

31 **Somaskanda, Shiva with Parvati and their son
Skanda, Tamil Nadu, south India, Chola period,
c. 1200, bronze.**

Collection of Asian Civilisations Museum.



The Cholas were a powerful dynasty that ruled parts of India from the 3rd century BCE to the 13th century CE. At their zenith, they ruled all of southern India and Sri Lanka. From the earliest centuries CE, southern India had traded with the Mediterranean world, and during the Chola dynasty, with China and Southeast Asia. It was a prosperous period, and extensive patronage resulted in the building of many temples. Among the most remarkable works of art are bronze temple sculptures made for processions.

Darshan—to see and be seen by the deity—is one of the fundamental principles of Hindu worship. Originally, this could only happen within the inner sanctum of a temple, where many devotees of low position were excluded. Around the 6th century, a new concept emerged: images of deities were paraded outside the temple during festivals, where they could be seen by all. This led to the production of many portable bronze sculptures.

This sculpture of a seated Shiva and his consort Parvati (also known as Uma) accompanied by their infant son Skanda is visualised in the Tamil Hindu tradition as a representation of an ideal divine ‘family’. *Somaskanda*, means “with Uma and Skanda”, and is the most important image of Shiva in southern India after the *linga*, his abstract form. This is because the faithful can obtain individual blessings from Shiva when he is in the presence of Uma. In Indian art, this image only appears in the south. This exquisite sculpture was made for festival processions, hence the loops on the base to attach poles for carrying it. The manner in which the pedestals fit into each other is unusual as the convention is a single pedestal for the trio.

32 **Sculpture of Walking Buddha,
Sukhothai, north-central Thailand,
bronze 15th–16th centuries.**

Collection of Asian Civilisations Museum.

This image of the Walking Buddha or *cankrama* ('walking back and forth') is a classic image of the Sukhothai Kingdom (1200-1350), which is today idealised in the Thai psyche as a golden age where Buddhism, the land, and its people flourished under the rule of benevolent Buddhist kings. Buddha is depicted in mid-stride, his right foot forward, and right hand in *abhaya mudra* (gesture of fearlessness, a hand gesture where the right hand is held upright with the palm facing outward). The left arm curves to accentuate the sense of fluid movement. The robe is barely visible except for fine outlines, and a flowing hemline. The *ushnisha*, or bump on the head which symbolises his enlightenment, rises to a flamed *cintamani* or top-knot.

Images of the Buddha were made for temples by donors in the belief that they would acquire merit for their next life. This image has been interpreted in various ways. It is thought to refer to Buddha's return from Tavatimsa Heaven where he preached the doctrine to his mother, and is also associated with meditation and magical powers, as found in stucco reliefs at temples in Sukhothai and the twin town of Si Satchanalai. The origins of the Walking Buddha remain unclear and the dating of several images continues to be questioned. More recently it was proposed that the city of Sukhothai was not abandoned in 1438 with the rise of Ayutthaya, but instead flourished until 1786 and that many architectural images of the Walking Buddha were probably produced during the 18th century.



**Shrine with Sumatinatha, the fifth Jain
Tirthankara, Gujarat or Kathyawar, India,
13th century, bronze inlaid with silver and copper.**

Collection of Asian Civilisations Museum.



Jains revere twenty-four *Jinas*, who have attained a state of bliss and transcendence. *Jina* means “liberator” or “conqueror”. They help all creatures to liberate their souls from the confines of the body. *Jinas* are also called “river crossers” or “forders” (*tirthankaras*), because they have been released from the eternal cycle of rebirth.

This shrine contains a central image of Sumatinatha, the fifth Jain Tirthankara, identified by geese on the throne. He is believed to possess miraculous powers to fulfil the wishes of pilgrims. He is surrounded by the other twenty-three *Jinas*.

The naked *Jinas* indicate that the patrons of the temple for which this shrine was made were devoted to the Digambara sect. An inscription dates this to Singh-Samvat 150, which translates as 1263 AD. The Singh-Samvat dating system was used exclusively in Gujarat and the Kathyawar peninsula until the 14th century.

Jains arrived in Singapore in the early 1900s from India. Today they number around 700, with 95% of the community originating from Gujarat. The Singapore Jain Religious Society was established in 1972 with its premises at 18 Jalan Yasin.

34 Qur'an, Yemen, dated AH 1184 (1770),
ink colours on paper, leather binding.

Collection of Asian Civilisations Museum.



This Qur'an from Yemen has a tan morocco binding with a stamped medallion. Its manuscript has 13 lines of text where the first, middle and last lines are written in red Muhaqqaq script and the other ten lines are in black Naskh script. The Muhaqqaq and Naskh scripts are part of the six classical cursive scripts.

For Muslims, the Qur'an is the visual embodiment of the Word of God and is hence considered sacred. The pious desire to beautify the Word of God was a central factor in the development of calligraphy in the Islamic world. One interesting aspect of Islamic art is that the form of expression can be found in a variety of media—thus you can find

calligraphy in manuscripts or as large inscriptions done in stone for buildings. Every page of this Qur'an has colourful, decorated headers and frames, and gold is used for chapter titles.

In Singapore, a large part of the Arab community has origins in the Hadhramawt region of Yemen. They arrived in Singapore from the early 19th century, when the Hadhramawt region was a British Protectorate. They were involved in the retail and wholesale trade, the Hajj industry and real estate development. A special group among the Hadhrami families are the *sayyids* who trace their descent from the Prophet Muhammad himself.

**Miniature New Testament, Armenia, or
Armenian diaspora, early 18th century, leather
binding, paper with ink, colours and gold leaf.**

Collection of Asian Civilisations Museum,
gift of Paula, Lady Brown.



This miniature manuscript is written in Armenian. It contains the four gospels, supplemented by decoration in the form of illustrations, rubricated initials and borders, some in gold leaf. The most elaborate illustrations depict the four evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, with the latter three represented by animals. The presence of the four gospels and absence of the Old Testament indicate that it is the New Testament rather than a complete Bible. Though mostly intact, the original title pages and binding have been replaced. It was probably made in Armenia or by Armenian communities in Western Asia in the early 18th century.

Armenia was the first country to adopt Christianity as its official religion in the early 4th century. The religion reached there at an early date; persecutions against Christians in 110, 230, and 287 were recorded by the Roman historians

Eusebius and Tertullian. The first Bibles were translated into Armenian in the early 5th century by Mesrop Mashtots, who invented the Armenian alphabet in 406 AD, but miniature Bibles similar to this manuscript did not appear until the early 17th century.

The Armenian community in Singapore has always been small, with no more than 100 members living here at any one time. It includes prominent members such as the Sarkies Brothers and Agnes Joaquim (best known for successfully cross-breeding two species of orchid into a new hybrid, the Vanda Ms Joaquim, which was later chosen to be Singapore's national flower). The oldest Christian Church in Singapore is the Armenian Apostolic Church of Saint Gregory the Illuminator, completed in 1836. Armenians in Singapore and Southeast Asia have origins in Isfahan, in Persia (today's Iran).

Collection of National Museum of Singapore.



Chesed-El Synagogue on Oxley Rise is one of two synagogues in Singapore, the other being Maghain Aboth Synagogue on Waterloo Street. Completed in 1905, it was designed by R. A. J. Bidwell of the architectural firm, Swan & MacLaren. Designed in the late Renaissance style, its façade is ornate with floral plasterwork, continuous corniches and heavy ornamentation. The synagogue is fronted by a three-arched porte-cochère (carriage porch), as can be seen in the photograph here. Classical architectural features such as arches and Corinthian columns, as well as large arched windows, are repeated throughout the building.

The first Jews arrived in Singapore not long after Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles. Most of them were Sephardic Jews from Baghdad and were businessmen

involved in trade. The first synagogue was built at Boat Quay at Synagogue Street, though the synagogue itself doesn't stand there anymore. As the community grew, a larger Maghain Aboth synagogue was built at Waterloo Street.

Chesed-El was built by local Jewish leader Manasseh Meyer to cater to a further expanding Jewish community. It was built on his sprawling, private Belle Vue estate. Chesed-El means "Bountiful Mercy and Goodness of God" in Hebrew. Chesed-El and Maghain Aboth Synagogues were both gazetted as national monuments in 1998. Managed by the Jewish Welfare Board today, they are open for certain festivals and for community activities throughout the year.

37 Hanging ornament, Punjab,
North India, 19th century.

Collection of Asian Civilisations Museum.



Detail of ornament.

This dome-shaped hanging ornament is decorated with ornate patterns and floral vine motifs. It also features seated figures depicting the 10 Sikh gurus with the central and largest one being that of Guru Nanak Dev, with a sunburst halo encircling his head. The remaining nine gurus appear in the circumference of the *chhatra*, facing him. The *chhatra* is often seen as a symbol of nobility and the divine. It would have been hung over the holy book as a sign of respect or used during a religious ceremony. This is still relevant in the modern-day context where the priest will place the Guru Granth Sahib (the 11th and Eternal Guru) underneath with the *granthi* (reader) holding a *chauri* (fly whisk) as a sign of respect.

The Sikhs come from the Punjab area in northwest India. It is generally believed that the first Sikhs who came to Singapore were sepoys in the employ of the British East India Company. Historically, the Sikhs were generally associated with police and security work. The term “Sikh” originally referred to the followers of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, though today it refers to those who follow the teachings of the 10 Sikh gurus.

Most male Sikhs adopt the term “Singh” (lion) as part of their name, while most female Sikhs have the name “Kaur” (princess). The Khalsa order is the major religious order in Sikhism. Khalsa Sikhs who have undergone the initiation ceremony must keep and wear the five Sikh symbols, namely unshorn hair, a wooden comb, a steel bracelet, a sword and cotton underwear.

38 Repousséd silver box showing Zoroastrian scenes, Bombay, 19th century, silver.

Collection of Indian Heritage Centre.



Parsi silver shops in Bombay and Gujarat supplied the Parsi community with ritual articles. In addition, silver items were imported from southern China as well. This box comprises four silver panels lined with an aromatic wood and a silver hinged cover; the silver is repousséd and chased with scenes relating to the Zoroastrian Parsis.

Depicted here are the deity Ahura Mazda and priests attending the sacred fire as well as a king-like figure shown sheltered under an umbrella accompanied by attendants carrying fly whisks. The use of the umbrella to denote kingship and the presence of the flywhisk is an Indian rather than a Persian practice. Inside, the box is split into two compartments by a silver partition. The base is plain, hammered silver.

Like the Jewish community, the Parsi community arrived in Singapore early in its history as a British colonial settlement. One of the most well-known Parsi merchants was Cursetjee Fromurzee, who, together with Englishman John M. Little, founded the department store, Little, Cursetjee & Co. (later John Little & Co.) at Raffles Place.

Zoroastrianism is one of the oldest religions in the world, originating in ancient Persia. The largest community of Parsis resides in the Indian port city of Mumbai, with Hong Kong also playing host to a large community in East Asia.

39 **Seated Wenchang (Daoist God of Literature),
Dehua, Fujian province, China,
early 17th century, porcelain.**

Gift of Frank and Pamela Hickley,
collection of Asian Civilisations Museum.



This is Wen Chang, the Daoist God of Literature. He is seated on a rock with a *ruyi* sceptre in his right hand, which symbolises blessing, power and health. The beautifully fluid drapery was finished with deeply carved folds, which emphasise the simple but voluminous style of the high official's robe. His portly stature is indicated by the rank badges that were worn by court officials of the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties.

Wen Chang is thought to have lived in the Tang (618–906) or Jin (1115–1234) dynasties before he was subsequently deified. He was worshipped by

scholars hoping for fortuitous examination results. Today, school children in Singapore put letters at his feet listing the examination subjects and results that they hope to achieve.

Dehua, located on the southeast coast of Fujian province, is well known for its production of white porcelain, known to Europeans as 'blanc de Chine'. The earliest Dehua porcelain was produced as early as the 14th century but the production and quality of these porcelain peaked around the 17th and 18th centuries.

Mortar and pestle belonging to the late Shirin Fozdar, Singapore, late 20th century, brass.

Gift of Shirin Fozdar,
collection of Indian Heritage Centre.



Born in India in 1905 to Persian parents of the Baha'i Faith, Shirin Fozdar was a staunch advocate of women's rights. She arrived in Singapore in 1950 with her husband, K. M. Fozdar. The Fozdars were among the first to bring the Baha'i Faith to Singapore. By 1952, there were enough Baha'is in Singapore to form the first Local Spirituality Assembly.

In 1953, Shirin was the force behind Singapore's first girls' club at Joo Chiat Welfare Centre. The club taught women English and arithmetic. She also played an important part in the formation of the Muslim Syariah court in 1958. She was

elected the Honorary Secretary of the Singapore Council of Women (SCW) in April 1952. In her role as the Honorary Secretary of SCW she also played a key role in the drafting and establishment of the Women's Charter in 1961.

This is a mortar and pestle used by Shirin Fozdar. Mortars and pestles have been used since ancient times for the preparation of spices, food and medicine. In Singapore, mortars and pestles are used by all ethnic communities and is a fundamental implement used in the preparation of a variety of local Singaporean food.

D) Art Historical

A proper art history of Singapore in the context of the Southeast Asian and larger Asian region would require its own full graphic spread of 60 objects. As such, this section zooms in on Singapore alone, featuring primarily Singaporean artists—one artist from the Singaporean diaspora in the United Kingdom, one pioneer Singaporean art collector, and one Chinese artist who loved Singapore.

An art history of modern Singapore generally commences with the Nanyang Artists, a seminal group of Singaporean painters represented by the quartet of Liu Kang, Chen Chong Swee, Chen Wen Hsi and Cheong Soo Pieng, and the enigmatic Georgette Chen. They were distinguished by their strong affiliation with the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts and by their works, which fused elements of East and West in a distinctive “Nanyang” (Southern Seas) style.

The Nanyang Artists were influenced in turn by major Chinese artists of the early 20th century such as the likes of Xu Beihong, Qi Baishi, Pu Ru, Ren Bonian, Wu Changshuo. A significant collection of these latter artists’ works was built up in the 1930s to 1950s by a pioneering local merchant and philanthropist, the late Dr Tan Tsze Chor, also known as the “pepper king”. Part of the collection, known as the Xiang Xue Zhuang Collection, was generously given to the state by Tan’s family in the 2000s. Around the same period, modern Chinese painter, Wu Guanzhong, regarded

as one of the most important modern Chinese painters today, also bequeathed a large gift of his artworks to the National Collection, as a gesture of his strong affection for Singapore.

From the 1960s onwards, Singapore saw the emergence of major artists in various genres such as ceramics, sculpture, painting, print-making and performance art, many of whom have been awarded the Cultural Medallion—the nation’s highest distinction for artists and cultural professionals.

A distinct break occurred in the late 1980s with the radical and controversial The Artists’ Village (TAV)—an artist colony, collective and movement established by contemporary artist Tang Da Wu, which counted amongst its ranks ground-breaking artists such as Amanda Heng, Chng Seok Tin and the late Lee Wen. TAV, still active today, derives its notoriety from a ban on performance art in Singapore following a performance by artist Josef Ng in 1994 which saw him snipping his pubic hair in public. TAV’s complex multi-faceted work defied categorisation and would prefigure today’s new generation of local installation and multi-media artists.

In the meantime, the 1990s and 2000s saw significant investment by the government into the arts and culture scene, with the aim of turning around the perception of Singapore as a “cultural desert” and re-positioning Singapore as a “Renaissance City”. The investment in the arts has borne fruit in terms of an extremely vibrant and active arts and heritage scene, with young Singaporean artists gaining prominence on the international stage.

41 ***A Pair of Horses*, Xu Beihong, China, c. 1940,
Chinese ink and colour on paper.**

Xiang Xue Zhuang Collection, in memory of Dr Tan Tsze Chor,
collection of Asian Civilisations Museum.



The late Dr Tan Tsze Chor was one of a small group of collectors and businessmen in Singapore who were strong supporters of the arts, and were inspired by ancient examples of the Chinese literati class of painter-calligrapher-cum-collectors. He named his collection and studio Xiang Xue Zhuang 香雪庄. The collection was known for its works from the masters of Chinese painting (in particular Xu Beihong, Ren Bonian and painters of the Shanghai School), ancient paintings and calligraphy from the Song to the Qing dynasties, transitional period (17th century) blue and white ceramics, Yixing wares, inkstones and Qi Baishi inkseals. The collection at the Asian Civilisations Museum consists of more than 100 of these paintings and scholarly objects, generously donated by the Tan family since 2000.

This painting of a pair of horses by Xu Beihong is one of the highlights of the collection. Although Xu Beihong was celebrated for his paintings of horses, he once said that he painted so many of them only because people liked them. They were indeed well received in Singapore in 1939 as many paintings of horses were said to be executed then. Xu's horses came to represent the indomitable spirit of China in the face of the Japanese invasions during late 1930s and early 1940s. This symbolism was apt as Xu was a patriot who raised money for the anti-Japanese movement through the sale of his works. Xu's horses are awe-inspiring and show his mature handling of the brush. The musculature of the horses in every pose as well as their dignity and elegance, are accurately defined in just a few key strokes.

***Artist and Model*, Liu Kang,
Singapore, 1954, oil on canvas.**

Gift of Shell Companies in Singapore,
collection of National Gallery Singapore.



Cheong Soo Pieng, Chen Chong Swee, Chen Wen Hsi and Liu Kang are some of the artists most commonly associated within the development of a distinctive ‘Nanyang style’ in art. Having all moved to Singapore from China during the 1930s and ’40s and sharing similar backgrounds in foundational art training in China, they were close contemporaries who were driven by a desire to develop their artistic styles and techniques to best capture their new surroundings in tropical Southeast Asia.

This desire led the four artists to plan a trip to Indonesia in 1952 in search of artistic inspiration. There, they travelled across the country for two months including an extended period in Bali. Having been inspired by the culture and the vibrant colours of Indonesia, the subsequent works they produced for an exhibition in 1953 displayed a clear intention to capture Southeast Asian subjects using both Western oil painting and Eastern ink painting traditions—a unique synthesis which would later come to be considered as a key characteristic of the Nanyang Style. Important works of all four artists are held in the collection of National Gallery Singapore today. For the purpose of this spread, the author has selected Liu Kang’s

Artist and Model, which depicts fellow artist Chen Wen Hsi sketching a woman during their trip to Indonesia, to represent this group of artists.

Born in Fujian Province, China, in 1911, Liu Kang attended the Xinhua Art Academy of Shanghai, where he learnt both Eastern and Western painting techniques. In 1928, he went to Paris where he was further exposed to art movements such as Fauvism and Post-Impressionism. Not only is he considered one of Singapore’s key artists, he was also a leading figure in the Society of Chinese Artists and the Singapore Art Society. In 1970, he was awarded the Public Service Star for his contributions in the field of art.

Artist and Model was done in a style that would come to typify Liu’s paintings following his arrival in Singapore in 1942. In this work, Liu eliminated the use of shadow and perspectival depth. Instead, he emphasised clearly defined forms with thick outlines and solid colours. With the resultant work recalling the visual aesthetic of *batik* painting, it is not surprising to learn that Liu was experimenting with the technique of *batik* painting having been inspired by his artist friend Chuah Thean Teng (based in Penang, Malaysia) during the 1950s.

***Self-Portrait*, Georgette Chen,
Singapore, c. 1946, oil on canvas.**

Gift of Lee Foundation,
collection of National Gallery Singapore.



Georgette Chen played a critical role in the development of the Nanyang style. Born in China in 1906, Georgette Chen spent her formative years in Shanghai, New York and Paris, where she found success as an artist following formal training in art academies and regular exhibitions. After a brief stay in Penang from 1951-1953, Chen eventually settled in Singapore in 1954 where she taught at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts till her retirement in 1980. In recognition of her contributions to Singapore art, Chen was awarded the Cultural Medallion in 1982.

Painted possibly a few years after her works were selected for exhibition at the prestigious Salon d'Automne in Paris, Chen's *Self Portrait* reveals her strong and confident personality. Her piercing gaze engages the viewer in a direct conversation. Like her other portraiture works, she composed *Self Portrait* with an economy of means—soft dabs of colour to delineate the contours of her face and differentiate the shades of her facial complexion.

44 *National Language Class, Chua Mia Tee, Singapore, 1959, oil on canvas.*

Collection of National Gallery Singapore.



Born in 1931 in China, Chua Mia Tee is regarded for his realist portraiture and depictions of Singapore's changing urban and cultural landscape. Chua moved to Singapore in 1937, when he and his family fled the Sino-Japanese war. In 1947, he was a student at Chung Cheng High School, but left mid-way to pursue an art education at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA), where he eventually graduated from in 1952. During his time at NAFA, Chua was the student of then-director Lim Hak Tai as well as Cheong Soo Pieng and See Hiang To. He sought to establish his practice through his pursuit of the 'real,' an interest that was cultivated by his encounters with European classical realism, Russian and Chinese

social realist art. He was one of the founding members of the Equator Art Society (EAS) in 1956 and took part in its annual exhibitions until its dissolution in 1972.

One of Chua's most iconic images, *National Language Class* captures an important stage of Singapore's history. Painted in 1959 when Chua was a member of the Equator Art Society, this work is charged with nationalist sentiment and commemorates Singapore's long-awaited attainment of self-governance in the same year. *National Language Class* depicts a group of Chinese students learning Malay, the newly-designated national language of Singapore.

**Zhangjiajie, Wu Guanzhong, China, 1997,
Chinese ink and colour on paper.**

Gift of the artist,
collection of National Gallery Singapore.



Wu Guanzhong is one of the most significant artists of 20th century China. Born in Yixing, Jiangsu Province, in 1919, Wu studied at the China Art Academy of Hangzhou in 1936. He was trained in oil and ink painting, and graduated from the academy in 1942. From 1946 to 1950, he travelled to Paris to study at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts on a government scholarship. In 2008, Wu donated to Singapore's National Collection 113 oil and ink paintings. This was the largest group donation Wu has made to a public institution. Singapore's collection of Wu Guanzhong now totals 129 pieces and spans through five decades of his artistic career.

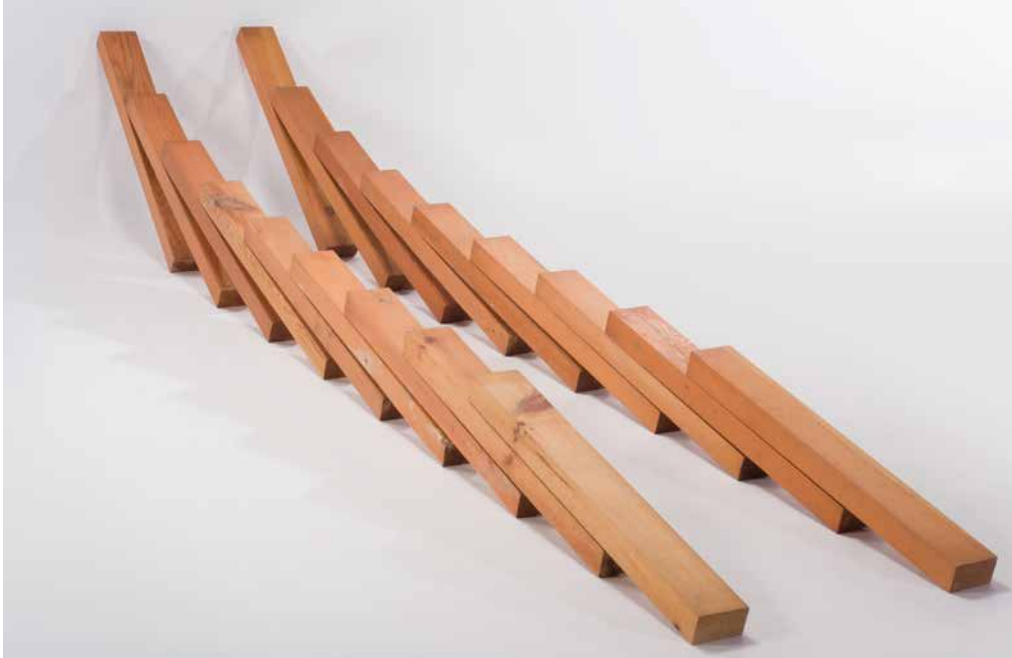
Zhangjiajie (张家界) is the largest artwork by Wu Guanzhong in our National Collection. It depicts a majestic view of the towering jagged sandstone columns unique to this protected forest park,

set behind a flowing river. Specks of magenta, orange and yellow-green cover the coarse sharp edges of the mountains, suggesting the arrival of either spring or autumn.

Wu Guanzhong first visited this area in the late 1970s while he was exploring the Hunan province, in search of beauty and capturing it in outdoor paintings and sketches. He encountered several villagers who all recommended him to visit a scenic landscape that is worthy of painting and would surely wow the world. Following the given directions, Wu stumbled into this earthly paradise. In 1982, the area was recognised as China's first national forest park and named Zhangjiajie National Forest Park. A decade later, in 1992, the park was officially recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

46 *Irrawaddy*, Kim Lim, Singapore/ UK,
1979, pinewood.

Collection of National Gallery Singapore.



Kim Lim was born in Singapore in 1936 and spent much of her early childhood in Penang and Malacca. Her father was Lim Koon Teck, a well-known magistrate in Penang and through her mother's side (Betty Seow), she is a descendant of Tan Kim Cheng, son of Singapore pioneer Tan Tock Seng. At the age of eighteen, Kim Lim went to London to pursue her career as an artist. She spent two years at St. Martin's School of Art (1954-56) concentrating on woodcarving. Then, she transferred to the Slade School of Art where she developed a strong interest in printmaking. She exhibited widely after graduating from the Slade in 1960.

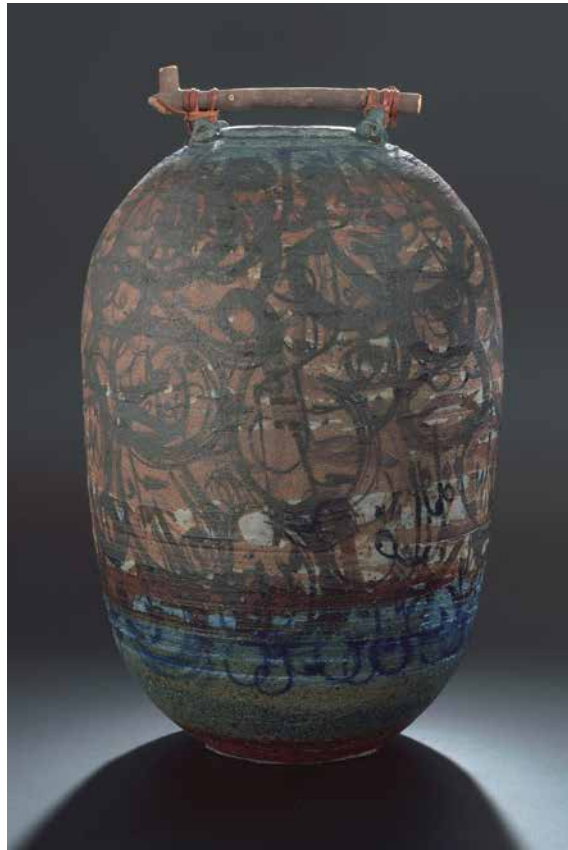
Kim Lim's early period early period is enumerated by works that were very much influenced by her formal study of art at St. Martin's and later at the Slade, alongside travels through Europe and Asia

with her artist-husband William Turnbull. These works, developed mostly between 1960 and 1979, are primarily executed in the medium of wood, fiberglass and steel.

This period was also marked by a significant high point, as Kim was included in the 'Hayward Annual' at the Hayward Gallery in 1977. A year prior, in 1976, she also found a place alongside her peers in Singapore, primarily those who were part of the Modern Arts Society and practising along the lines of abstraction, at the inaugural exhibition that surveyed currents in Singapore art at the former National Museum Art Gallery. In 1974, she was also invited for a solo-show at the then influential Alpha Gallery that had developed a reputation for being at the centre of debates on minimalism in Southeast Asia. Kim passed away in 1997.

47 *Interplay Between Traditions and Contemporary
Forms: #2 Jawi and Arabic Forms,*
Iskander Jalil, Singapore, 2002,
ceramic/stoneware with oxide/ glazes.

Collection of Singapore Art Museum.



Born in 1940 in Singapore, Iskandar Jalil is acknowledged as one of Singapore's most significant artists in the practice of ceramic art. Iskandar was originally trained as a mathematics and science teacher. His turning point came when the Colombo Plan scholarship enabled him to study at the Tajimi City Pottery Design and Technical Centre in Japan in 1972, which cultivated in the artist, deeply-held attitudes and techniques for dealing with the discipline.

Travel has also offered Iskandar another source of aesthetic ideas, colours and motifs. His use of Jawi script as well as floral, geometrical and calligraphic motifs that appear on the surfaces of his ceramic works reveal influences from across Southeast Asia and Japan. Material culture from the region such as *batik* textiles and Jawi script have also been translated by Iskandar into patterns that are both meaningful and aesthetic. In 1988, Iskandar was awarded the Cultural Medallion, Singapore's highest accolade for artistic excellence and contributions to the arts.

Tiger's Whip, Tang Da Wu,
Singapore, 1991, mixed media.

Collection of Singapore Art Museum.



Tang Da Wu, born in 1943, is widely regarded as the central figure in the development of 'alternative' art in Singapore. A graduate from Goldsmith College, University of London with a Master of Art, he led a group of younger artists to establish The Artists Village in Singapore in 1988, where performance, installation and painting took place.

Since the late 1990s, Tang has been working on community projects that deal with memory, history as well as environmental issues. In 1999, Tang was awarded the Arts and Culture Prize at the

10th Fukuoka Asian Culture Prize and in 2007, he was one of four artists who represented Singapore at the Venice Biennale.

Tiger's Whip, an installation and performance piece, was first presented to the Singapore public in 1991 in Chinatown with the intention of highlighting the plight of the endangered tigers, which are hunted for their penises as Chinese superstition makes them out to be a powerful aphrodisiac. The work shows the clash of such a belief with the reality of extinction.

49 *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Ho Tzu Nyen,
Singapore, 2011, single-channel HD video
projection and 13-channel sound files.

Collection of Singapore Art Museum.

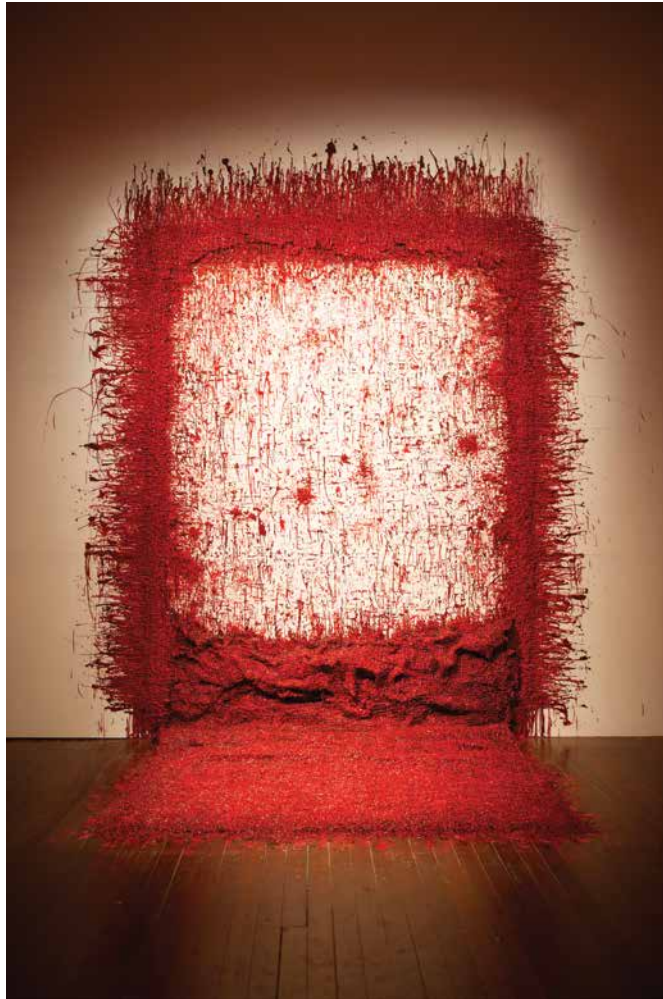


Ho Tzu Nyen, born in 1976, is a Singaporean artist who works primarily in the medium of film and multi-media installations. *The Cloud of Unknowing* is an installation that was commissioned for the Singapore Pavilion at the 54th Venice Biennale International Art Exhibition. In this video installation, Ho takes as his central subject the cloud, and explores its symbolic and aesthetic representation across cultures, history and geography.

Shot within a block of public housing in Singapore, *The Cloud of Unknowing* revolves around eight characters and their encounters with a cloud or cloud-like figure. *The Cloud of Unknowing* portrays the characters in a moment of revelation, and here the reference made by the artwork's title is elucidated. *The Cloud of Unknowing* is also the title of a medieval text presumed to be written by a cloistered monk on the experience and trials of meditative contemplation upon the divine, where the cloud paradoxically represents both the moment of uncertainty and connection with divinity.

50 ***Status*, Jane Lee, Singapore, 2009, mixed media.**

Collection of Singapore Art Museum.



Born in Singapore in 1963, Jane Lee graduated from LASALLE-SIA College of the Arts with a Bachelor of Arts in Fine Arts and a Diploma in Fashion. Amongst other awards, she was the recipient of the inaugural Singapore Art Exhibition Art Prize in 2007. Since 2002, she has exhibited widely in the region, including at international platforms such as Singapore Biennale in 2008.

Status examines the genre of painting by means of pushing the limits of materials and techniques by highlighting the creation process. The work, which is monumental, crosses the boundaries of painting, sculpture and installation, defying traditional categorisation. With the paint seemingly escaping from its frame and pooling at the bottom of the work, it compels the viewer to examine it from several angles, and also to re-think the practice of painting in this new era of art-making. *Status* was the centrepiece at Lee's 2009 solo exhibition.

E) Self-Government & Independence

The State of Singapore Constitution of 21 November 1958 articulated the structure of government for a self-governing Singapore, with the post of governor replaced by the office of the Yang di-Pertuan Negara, and with a fully-elected Legislative Assembly. Self-government was actualised on 5 June 1959, with the late Lee Kuan Yew sworn in as Singapore's first Prime Minister, alongside his first cabinet. To mark this significant milestone, a new national flag and anthem were adopted.

In 1963, Singapore ceased being a colony of Great Britain by merging with Malaya, Sarawak and Sabah to form the Federation of Malaysia. Barely two years later, Singapore would leave the federation, with the Proclamation of the Republic of Singapore on 9 August 1965 declaring Singapore its own independent republic.

Singapore's post-independence years saw significant economic growth grounded in a burgeoning manufacturing and electronics sector. Heritage brands such as Tiger Balm and Singapore's blossoming into the "Garden City" of Asia contributed to a more vibrant lifestyle and tourism scene.

In the 1980s, economic growth was accompanied by advances in the socio-cultural space, with Singapore investing in what continues to be one of the most extensive and radical public housing programmes in the world. The inclusion of a humble bus ticket from this period as the final object in the graphic spread makes a poignant statement on the great strides post-independence Singapore has made, from being a post-colonial, developing nation to today's global, first-world metropolis.

Singapore in the 1990s and 2000s continued to sustain its growth and build on its global positioning through espousing free trade and continually diversifying its economy while enhancing its urban, social and environmental landscape and infrastructure. It is considered one of the most dynamic and liveable cities in the world today.

51 Singapore (Constitution) Order in Council,
21 November 1958, Singapore.

Collection of National Library, Singapore.

(Vide Gazette Supplement No. 81 of 27th November, 1958).

No. S 293—STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS.

1958 No. 1956.

SINGAPORE.

THE SINGAPORE (CONSTITUTION) ORDER IN COUNCIL, 1958.

Made - - - - - 21st November, 1958.
Laid before Parliament - - - 27th November, 1958.
Coming into Operation,
Sections 121 (5) and 123 - - - 28th November, 1958.
Remainder - - - - - On a day to be appointed under
section 2. ie. 3rd June 1959.

ARRANGEMENT OF ORDER.

PART I.

PRELIMINARY.

Section

- 1 ... Interpretation.
- 2 ... Citation and commencement.
- 3 ... Revocation.

PART II.

YANG DI-PERTUAN NEGARA.

- 4 ... Office of Yang di-Pertuan Negara.
- 5 ... Powers and duties of Yang di-Pertuan Negara.
- 6 ... Publication of Commission and taking of Oaths by Yang di-Pertuan Negara.
- 7 ... Succession to functions of Yang di-Pertuan Negara.
- 8 ... Disposal of land.
- 9 ... Grant of Pardon.
- 10 ... Appointments, etc. of officers.
- 11 ... Petitions.
- 12 ... Remuneration and Civil List of Yang di-Pertuan Negara and remuneration of acting Yang di-Pertuan Negara.
- 13 ... Personal staff of the Yang di-Pertuan Negara.
- 14 ... Yang di-Pertuan Negara entitled to information.

Singapore's 1958 constitution was the culmination of three constitutional talks in 1956, 1957, and 1958—the first led by Singapore's first Chief Minister David Marshall, and the latter two by his successor, Lim Yew Hock. The Chief Ministers led all-party missions to London to negotiate the terms of a new constitution. The first mission ended in failure over internal security arrangements, but the second and third missions were successful, providing for a new constitution to be written to establish the State of Singapore.

The 1958 constitution provided for self-government for Singapore through a fully elected 51-seat Legislative Assembly and replaced the governor with the Yang di-Pertuan Negara as head of state, and the Chief Minister with the Prime Minister.

Following the victory of the People's Action Party in the May 1959 elections, Lee Kuan Yew was sworn in as Singapore's first Prime Minister. The British were still in charge of Singapore's defence and foreign affairs. Internal security was managed by an Internal Security Council comprising representatives from Singapore, Britain and the Federation of Malaya.

The first local Yang di-Pertuan Negara was Yusof bin Ishak who was appointed in December 1959. He later became Singapore's first President when it gained independence as a Republic in 1965.

Lee Kuan Yew's swearing-in as Prime Minister of Singapore on 5 June 1959, Lai Kui Fang, 1992, Singapore, oil on canvas.

Collection of National Museum of Singapore.



Lee Kuan Yew and his first cabinet were sworn in on 5 June 1959, marking the date Singapore's self-government was actualised. With no photographic records of the event, this painting of the swearing-in of Lee Kuan Yew as Prime Minister of Singapore in 1959 provides a suggestion of what that historic moment could have looked like. It shows a close-up of Lee and William Goode—the last Governor of Singapore—as well as an aide-de-camp on the left background.

Lai Kui Fang is a distinguished Singaporean portrait painter who studied on a French Government scholarship at the École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts. In 1968, he was conferred the Knight of the French Order of Arts and Letters, which was upgraded in 1975 to Officer of Arts, the highest honour bestowed by the French government in the artistic fields. He paints in the European classical tradition and has been commissioned to paint portraits of multiple political leaders in Singapore.

Vinyl record titled *Majulah Singapura*,
Singapore, c. 1960s.

Collection of National Museum of Singapore.



Zubir Said is among Singapore's most prominent music composers and songwriters. He has composed over 1,500 songs, comprising film songs, popular songs and national songs. He is best known as the composer of the national anthem of Singapore, *Majulah Singapura*.

He was active as a composer from the 1930s to the 1950s. In 1949, as the Malay film industry was beginning to flourish, Zubir Said joined Shaw Brothers, taking on the role as an orchestra conductor with Malay Film Productions Ltd, one of the production arms of Shaw Brothers. In the early 1950s, he switched to work for Cathay Keris and was its music director for 14 years until his retirement in 1964. He composed background music and wrote songs for selected scenes, using his vast knowledge of European and Asian scores, in particular Malay melodies. He composed musical scores and songs for some of the most iconic and memorable films in

Singapore's film history like *Sumpah Pontianak*, *Sri Mersing*, *Chuchu Datok Merah*, and worked with popular artistes including P. Ramlee, R. Ismail and Nona Asiah.

The City Council and Mayor of Singapore made a recommendation to the City Council for Zubir Said to compose a song to mark the official opening of Victoria Theatre following renovation works. He wrote *Majulah Singapura*—which means “Onward Singapore” in Malay. This was performed for the first time by the Singapore Chamber Ensemble at the refurbished Victoria Theatre in 1958. *Majulah Singapura* was subsequently selected and declared the national anthem of Singapore on 11 November 1959, with some slight amendments to the lyrics. It was formally presented to the people as a state national anthem on 3 December 1959, the same day Yusok bin Ishak was inaugurated as the Yang di-Pertuan Negara.

54 Singapore flag, Singapore, 1960-1980.

Collection of National Museum of Singapore.



The national flag is Singapore's most visible symbol of statehood, symbolising its sovereignty, pride and honour. The creation of a new national flag was therefore a vital task for Singapore's newly elected cabinet in 1959. Deputy Prime Minister Dr Toh Chin Chye was placed in charge of a committee to create a new flag to replace the British Union Jack, which had flown over the island for nearly 140 years from 1819 to 1959.

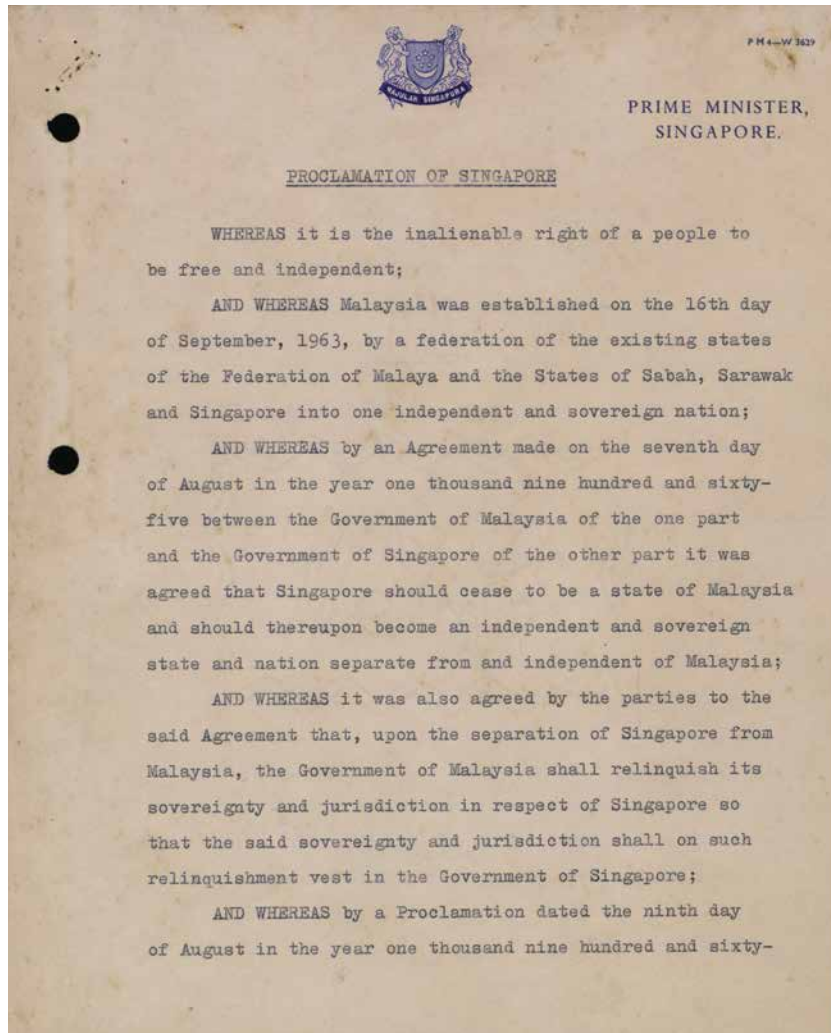
Dr Toh had firm ideas about the design of the flag. To ensure that the flag would not be confused with those of other nations, Dr Toh studied the flags of countries represented in the United Nations and showed the cabinet various designs for their consideration. After careful deliberations, the Legislative Assembly endorsed the red and white flag on 18 November 1959, together with the state crest and national anthem. The national flag was

unveiled on 3 December 1959 at the installation of the first Malayan-born Yang di-Pertuan Negara (Head of State), Yusof bin Ishak. The ceremony was held in the City Hall chambers. The flag was publicly unveiled for the first time on the City Hall steps. The flag was later adopted officially as Singapore's national flag upon her independence in 1965.

The flag consists of two equal horizontal sections, red above white. In the upper left section are a white crescent moon, and five white stars forming a circle. Each feature of the flag has its own distinctive meaning and significance. Red symbolises universal brotherhood and equality of man. White signifies pervading and everlasting purity and virtue. The crescent moon represents a young nation on the ascendant. The five stars stand for the nation's ideals of democracy, peace, progress, justice and equality.

55 **Proclamation of the Republic of Singapore,
Singapore, 9 August 1965.**

Collection of the National Archives of Singapore.



This landmark document proclaims Singapore's separation from Malaysia and its beginnings as an independent and sovereign republic. It was drafted by Minister for Law Edmund Barker and signed by Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew. It announced the constitutional change set in motion by the separation agreement and eventually effected through legislation passed in both the Malaysian and Singapore parliaments.

The secrecy and hurried nature of the separation is reflected in the plain presentation of the Proclamation of Singapore. Rust stains show that the document had been stapled together, and the holes punched on the side show that the paper had been filed in a way similar to other working documents.



PM4-W 3629

PRIME MINISTER,
SINGAPORE.

- 2 -

five The Prime Minister of Malaysia Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj Ibni Almarhum Sultan Abdul Hamid Halim Shah did proclaim and declare that Singapore shall on the ninth day of August in the year one thousand nine hundred and sixty-five cease to be a state of Malaysia and shall become an independent and sovereign state and nation separate from and independent of Malaysia and recognised as such by the Government of Malaysia.

Now I LEE KUAN YEW Prime Minister of Singapore, DO HEREBY PROCLAIM AND DECLARE on behalf of the people and the Government of Singapore that as from today the ninth day of August in the year one thousand nine hundred and sixty-five Singapore shall be forever a sovereign democratic and independent nation, founded upon the principles of liberty and justice and ever seeking the welfare and happiness of her people in a more just and equal society.

Dated the 9th day of August, 1965.

The following excerpt proclaims
Singapore's independence:

"[...] by a Proclamation dated the ninth day of August in the year one thousand nine hundred and sixty-five the Prime Minister of Malaysia Tunku Abdul Rahman Outra Al-Haj Ibni Almarhum Sultan Abdul Hamid Halim Shah did proclaim and declare that Singapore shall on the ninth day of August in the year one thousand nine hundred and sixty-five cease to be a State of Malaysia and shall become an independent and sovereign state and nation separate from and independent of Malaysia and recognised as such by the Government of Malaysia.

Now I LEE KUAN YEW Prime Minister of Singapore, DO HEREBY PROCLAIM AND DECLARE on behalf of the people and the Government of Singapore that as from today the ninth day of August in the year one thousand nine hundred and sixty-five Singapore shall forever be a sovereign democratic and independent nation, founded upon the principles of justice and ever seeking the welfare and happiness of her people in a more just and equal society."

56 **Singapore Ginger (*Zingiber singaporensis*),
Singapore, described in November 2014.**

Collection of the Singapore Botanic Gardens' Herbarium.



A herbarium specimen is a pressed sample of a plant that is stored for future reference. The herbarium at the Singapore Botanic Gardens is home to about 750,000 dried paper mounted plant specimens of which about 10,000 are type specimens (the ultimate points of reference for the correct application of species' names). The gardens' preserved collections were first started by James Murton in 1875 but greatly expanded from 1888 when Henry Ridley was the director. The herbarium is Singapore's major archive for botanical research specimens. It serves as an important reference centre for research on the region's plant diversity for botanists around the world.

Commonly known as the Singapore Ginger, this species was described as new to science in November 2014. It was named *Zingiber singaporensis* as Singapore was where it was discovered and is

the only place in world where the species is known to occur in the wild. This plant can be found in Singapore's primary forests and as there are only a few populations left, it is considered critically endangered. It is receiving special attention under the National Parks Board's Species Recovery Programme.

Established in 1859, the Singapore Botanic Gardens played an important historical role in the introduction and promotion of many plants of economic value to Southeast Asia, including the Pará rubber tree. Today, the 82-hectare Gardens is a key civic and community space, and an international tourist destination. Attracting an annual visitorship of more than five million, it is also an important institution for tropical botanical and horticultural research, education and conservation. The Gardens was inscribed as Singapore's first UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2015.

57 **Setron television set, Singapore, 1960s–1970s.**

Collection of National Museum of Singapore.



This television set was produced by Setron (Singapore Electronics) Limited, which made Singapore's first locally-assembled black-and-white television set in late 1964. Setron Limited was previously a coffee trading company, Heng Guan Limited, which had to shut down as its Indonesian-based business was affected by Konfrontasi (Confrontation). Set up by local businessmen, Setron Limited was the first television assembly plant in Southeast Asia when it began manufacturing in late 1964. Setron became a household name in Singapore by the 1970s.

The Setron factory was located at the former Tanglin Halt Industrial Estate, one of the first industrial estates in Singapore. Measuring some 20 acres of land and comprising a total of 38 factory lots for cottage industries, the establishment of the Tanglin Halt Industrial Estate marked Singapore's drive into industrialisation and diversification

from a declining entrepôt economy. Tanglin Halt was chosen for its close proximity to the former Malayan Railways and large labour catchment.

Managed by the Jurong Town Corporation, the former Tanglin Halt Industrial Estate was developed in the 1960s to house light and medium industries. Land was leased to budding industrialists on easy repayment terms and tax incentives were given to multinational corporations. By the end of the decade, Tanglin Halt was home to a smorgasbord of factories. Aside from Setron, there were Van Houten chocolate factory, Diethelm aluminium factory and Unitex garment factory. In fact, it was at Tanglin Halt that Setron rolled out Singapore's first black and white television in 1964. In the late 1980s, factories at the former Tanglin Halt Industrial Estate began to relocate to bigger industrial estates and clusters in order to enjoy economies of scale.

**58 Advertisement signboard for Tiger Balm Ten
Thousand Golden Oil, Singapore, c. 1970s.**

Collection of National Museum of Singapore.

This is a metal signboard with an advertisement in Chinese for the Tiger Balm brand of pain-relieving ointment known as ‘Ten Thousand Golden Oil’. The creators of Tiger Balm were brothers Aw Boon Haw and Aw Boon Par, who were born in Rangoon, Burma (today’s Yangon, Myanmar). Boon Par took charge of production and developed other Tiger brand products, while Boon Haw packaged and marketed them. By 1918, the Aw family had become the richest family in Rangoon.

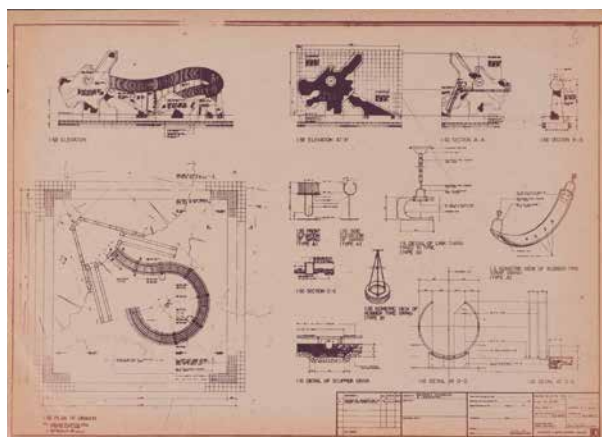
In 1932, Boon Haw built a villa for his second wife in Hong Kong. Behind the house, he built an elaborate garden that could be appreciated much like a Chinese landscape painting from the rooftop. Craftsmen well-versed in Chinese folklore were hired from Swatow, China, to build the garden. These same craftsmen then travelled to Singapore to build the Tiger Balm Gardens, or Haw Par Villa (named after the two brothers), in 1937.

Haw Par Villa was built as a residence by Boon Haw for his younger brother, Boon Par. Though it was private property, part of the garden was opened to the public as Boon Haw wanted it to be an advertisement for Tiger Balm products. The gardens were a popular leisure destination till the 1980s and were known for their larger-than-life dioramas featuring scenes taken from Chinese religion, history and mythology. These dioramas were meant to educate visitors about fundamental Chinese values and beliefs, such as filial piety, resisting temptation and evil-doing, loyalty and fidelity, as well as community service, charity, and judgement in one’s afterlife. Tiger Balm continues to be a popular local heritage brand today, and Haw Par Villa still stands in its original location in Pasir Panjang.



**59 HDB playground prototype drawings,
Khor Ean Ghee, Singapore, 1970–1979.**

Collection of National Museum of Singapore.



In 1960, the Housing and Development Board (HDB) was formed to replace the earlier Singapore Improvement Trust. It was tasked with building and managing low-cost public housing for the lower-income groups. HDB tackled the housing problem by redeveloping urban and rural areas and resettling people into new housing estates.

In the 1970s, HDB designed a range of playground designs for its public housing estates. The first series was animal-themed while the second wave of playgrounds featured objects and concepts easily identifiable with the local culture.

This is a set of Housing Development Board (HDB) playground prototypes from Khor Ean Ghee, who is the designer of the first playgrounds found at HDB estates such as the iconic dragon and pelican playgrounds. These playground prototypes are his

personal copies. Khor worked in HDB from 1969 till 1983. When he was tasked to design playgrounds for HDB estates, the interior designer who had no training in playground designs took inspiration from our local identity. HDB built many of these locally-designed playgrounds in the 1970s and 1980s before it started to import modular playgrounds from overseas suppliers in the 1990s.

Today, many of the locally-designed playgrounds have been demolished. These HDB playgrounds are fondly remembered by many Singaporeans who had spent their childhood days there. They play a significant role in our collective memory. These playgrounds also marked a time when HDB new towns were formed with the provision of many facilities within the residents' reach. Toa Payoh's iconic Dragon Playground is one of two remaining playgrounds of such design in Singapore.

60 Singapore Bus Services (SBS) bus ticket with value of 45 cents, Singapore, 1970s–1980s.

Collection of National Museum of Singapore.

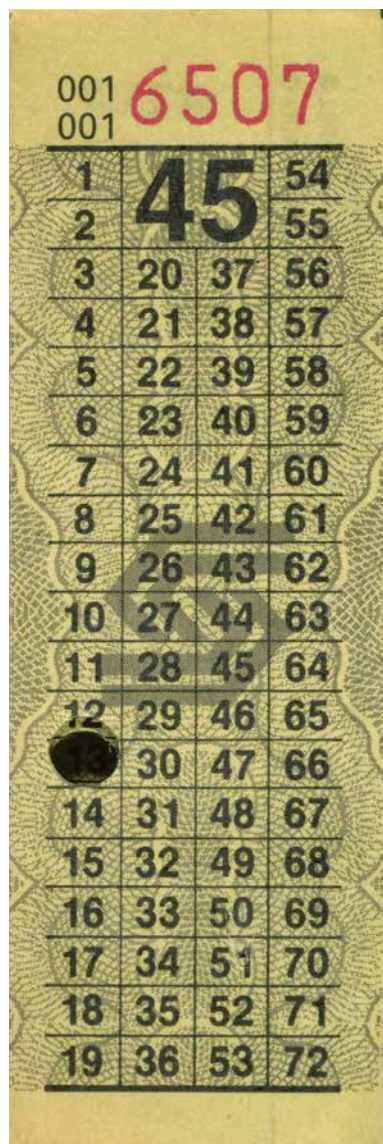
Singapore Bus Service (SBS) Limited was formed in 1973 through the merger of three existing bus companies, Amalgamated Bus Company, Associated Bus Services and United Bus. The company became a major fixture in the local public transport landscape and features highly in Singapore’s transport heritage. It continues to offer public transport services to the Singaporean public today.

This is a Singapore Bus Services (SBS) bus ticket from the 1970s and ‘80s, with a value of 45 cents. A generation of young Singaporeans, growing up during those times, would remember these simple bus tickets fondly. Upon boarding the familiar red-and-white SBS buses, they would have had to purchase these tickets from the bus conductor, who would perforate the tickets with a ticket punch to prevent them from being reused on another journey. The value of the tickets depended on the distance travelled. These punched tickets were later replaced by printed tickets.

Printed on the back of this ticket is the Courtesy Campaign slogan and mascot. The Courtesy Campaign was launched by Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew in 1979 in an attempt to encourage Singaporeans to show courtesy, consideration and kindness to one and all. The campaign mascot, Singa the lion, was introduced in 1982 and it has appeared on posters, billboards and various media advertisements.

Singapore has launched numerous campaigns since the 1970s to address prevailing issues of the time. Aside from the Courtesy Campaign, other memorable campaigns from the 1970s to the 1990s include the National Productivity Movement,

with Teamy the Bee as its mascot; the “Use Your Hands” Campaign to encourage students to clean up school premises; and the “Clean and Green Week” Campaign, with a friendly frog, Captain Green, as its mascot.



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Notes

- ¹. According to the Pew Research Center's demographic study in 2014.
<https://www.pewforum.org/2014/04/04/global-religious-diversity/>

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The object captions in this graphic spread consist of existing curatorial content that has been minimally edited for length by the author. This content was researched and written by curators, archivists and subject specialists at the institutions featured in this spread at various times in the history of these institutions. The content has been, in most cases, adapted from curatorial content directly provided by the institutions, existing content in collection databases, display captions in the institutions' galleries, as well as the following publications and online references created and maintained by the featured institutions.