When I entered the NX Gallery, I was mystified by the sights and sounds lying in wait. Four television screens greeted me, followed by sounds of a band rehearsing. In the adjoining rooms, a 20 minute video documentary, a wall of photographs, and an interesting installation of figures struck my curiosity. Not knowing how to react, I took my time to view the artworks.

I found the four short films thoroughly amusing and enjoyable. Ahmad Mashadi, Head of NUS Museum and co curator of the exhibition revealed that Ming Wong’s 4 Malay Stories comprising numerous outtakes of scenes from P. Ramlee films with the artist playing different characters, was ‘a reflection of social values and social conditions at different points in time’. This work also reflected the nature of interethnic mimicry as Ming Wong, who knew no Malay, attempted to speak the language.

No Man’s Band, a clandestine recording of school bands warming up before the rehearsals, was a fascinating social experiment crafted by Ang Song Ming on whether people would seize the opportunity to transgress, given the chance. Francis Ng’s photography series, Kill’em All, Love’em All showcased 22 photographs of people in unusual and contrived guises. Taken against the interior of a shop-house, the setting provided an interesting contrast with the models.

The question of persona was addressed in the works of Michael Lee’s Skive: A Worker’s Guide, an installation of cutout photographic images which were everywhere – on the wall, ceiling, floor and sticking out from air vents. It featured the artist enacting poses resembling anything but work, demonstrating the idea of the masquerade of corporate identity and its tension with individuality.
Tan Pin Pin’s documentary, Moving House, delved into the concepts of societal change and modernization, and the results such shifts had for people, relations, customs, and traditions in the context of exhuming buried relatives to free land for development. It was interesting to watch the relatives’ reactions when their ancestor’s tombstone was hacked and the remains removed from the cemetery. I was impressed that the works, although encompassing important meanings, were presented in plain, simple, and understandable contexts. Heman Chong, co-curator, said they chose to take ‘a non-academic approach to an academic subject, that of the formation of communities and groups.’ Both curators chose to leave the subject matter fluid and open to interpretation, to avoid prescribing any one conclusion.

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The travelling installation I WAS HERE by Francis Ng was brought in by NUS Museum specially for the Commencement. It proved popular with graduands, their friends and family. The three simple words—I WAS HERE—held a much deeper meaning for the graduands. ‘They are good, symbolic words. They go well with the emotions of graduation, the memories,’ said Suhana, who graduated with an engineering degree. Nirun, another graduand, shared similar feelings. ‘Graduation marks the end of my time at NUS, my last time as an NUS student. It’s nice to have something concrete to mark such a significant part of my life.’

Preeti Samudra
On 19 July 2007, His Excellency Miles Kupa, Australian High Commissioner and guest-of-honour, proudly opened the exhibition co-organised by NUS Museum and The University of Queensland. This spectacular collection of Australian aboriginal artworks featured printmaking by the Lockhart River Art Gang and works of internationally recognised artists Rosella Namok, Fiona Omeenyo, Samantha Hobson, Adrian King and Silas Hobson. These artists lead Australia’s only youth-driven aboriginal art movement that grew out of an education initiative driven by the Australian government.

The guests were fascinated by the uniqueness and individuality expressed by the artists in both the themes for their artwork and the techniques used. Those who had pre-existing ideas about aboriginal art were pleasantly surprised at how different this exhibition was and enjoyed the contemporary, unique styles used to express traditional aboriginal life. Wandering through the exhibits, they took their time analyzing and appreciating the intricacies of the paintings. ‘I was initially surprised by the art. It wasn’t what I thought it would be. But after seeing it, I really liked it,’ revealed Grace Tan, a year 3, Faculty of Science student at NUS.

We enjoyed the guided tour given by Dr Sally Butler, curator of the exhibition. ‘Knowing the stories behind the artworks made them mean so much more to me,’ someone was overhead saying. ‘Otherwise, I would have liked the paintings but not really understood them.’

The unique and spectacular nature of the art made this exhibition an enjoyable and fulfilling experience for those who attended it. ‘I liked the exhibition,’ commented a guest. ‘I’m definitely coming back.’

Preeti Samudra

Dr Sally Butler gave a talk, The Spectacle of Tradition in Lockhart River Art on 21 July 2007 to discuss how Lockhart art translates the sense of cultural spectacle inherent in Aboriginal life into a contemporary art form that connects with people across the world.
Over 800 works by Dutch colonial and modern Indonesian artists reside in a little-known modern and efficient satellite town at the western edge of metropolitan Jakarta, Indonesia. They belong to the excellent collection of the Museum Universitas Pelita Haparan (MUPH), a university museum established in 1996 by the Indonesian conglomerate Lippo Group within its flagship township development Lippo Karawaci. I visited the museum during a fortnight’s residency in Edwin Gallery in Jakarta. Meant as a familiarisation trip, the visit marks an interest on the part of NUS Museum and MUPH to explore collaborative opportunities.

Even operating as a modest three-person curatorial, collection and administrative team, MUPH has acquired an admirable collection focused on Dutch colonial paintings from painters such as Basoeki Abdullah and Wakidi and modern Indonesian art from artists such as Affandi and S.Sudjojono. Founded just over a decade ago, the museum is looking forward to its new phase of development within the next five years – a new, permanent and expanded gallery and office premises. In a country where art galleries and private collectors arguably play a more critical role than public museums in shaping the development and understanding of Indonesian art, MUPH’s collection holds immense and exciting potential for research work into modern Indonesian art when it becomes more readily accessible to art and research communities in the near future.

In the meantime, the MUPH collection continues to expand with strategic acquisitions. Through collaborative undertakings, the two institutions can share resources and assist each other to develop research and exhibition expertise.
I was first introduced to NUS Museum by a friend who was very keen in becoming a volunteer guide. We became the first batch of volunteer museum guides (docents) trained by the Museum. The training took five months and it covered the various aspects of work that a docent needs to know. At the end of the training we had to pass a practical test which was somewhat stressful. However, we were fortunate to have very patient and nurturing facilitators to help us overcome our difficulties.

The learning did not stop there. There is so much to learn about the exhibits in the Museum. I was a little apprehensive in the beginning. I started to read up on Ceramics and Chinese arts seriously.

The most challenging task is to engage young children in the appreciation of arts. It is a skill not easy to master.

With every change of display in the museum, we will have an update and orientation by the curator or the artist. It is very enlightening to hear them sharing their expertise with us. It boosts our confidence in our guiding. There is always new knowledge to acquire and that is the reward of being a docent!
Preeti Samudra

Preeti is a final year student at University of Michigan, Ann Arbor majoring in Communication Studies and Psychology. She did the Museum newsletter layout for last two issues, contributed articles for this issue, assisted in exhibition installations, outreach events and exhibition openings. ‘I thought that it was a really good experience and the staff was really friendly and helpful.’

Fiona Heng

Fiona is a final year student in Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences majoring in History. She is working with the Assistant Curator of the Lee Kong Chian Collection in the valuation of Chinese Paintings. ‘Getting lost from admiring the paintings instead of doing my “evaluation” is common at work. Being here at the museum has exposed me to a myriad of classical maestros of Chinese paintings, and of equally apt local and contemporary artists who definitely need more recognition from us.’

Check out our internship opportunities at: www.nus.edu.sg/museum/internship.html
US alumna Jacey Yeh Yue Hann (B. Soc.Sci, 2002) was never particularly interested in visual art until a few years ago when she became an avid fan of one particular artist. He was Yeh Chi Wei (1915-1981), a brilliant painter who influenced the Singapore art scene during his time - and also Jacey’s grandfather. Today, one of Yeh Chi Wei’s paintings, Dawn at Angkor, hangs in Highlights of Southeast Asian Collection at NUS Museum.

Now with the NUS Centre For the Arts’ Group Management team, Jacey never knew her grandfather as he had passed away when she was a baby. She knew that her grandfather was an art teacher but only found out that he was an artist when she was in secondary school and she discovered this quite by accident. She was flipping through the credits of her textbook when she stumbled upon her grandfather’s name and saw his painting. ‘That really piqued my interest,’ Jacey revealed, and she started to delve deeper into her grandfather’s artistic career.

She learned that her grandfather had a unique style of painting. He used a palette knife to create a textured surface that paintbrushes could not achieve. He would also paint directly on the canvas without any sketches to guide him. According to the catalogue for his first solo exhibition, he was inspired by ancient Chinese calligraphy, as well as stone and bronze inscriptions. He incorporated these elements into his paintings, adopting this ‘simplified, primitive and abstract style with an abundant use of dark colours, calligraphic black ink, enlarged images and stone-hard forms’.

When Jacey learned that her grandfather had wanted a second solo art exhibition, she decided to fulfill her grandfather’s last wish. To make it happen, she has to further her knowledge of her grandfather’s artistic journey and life. ‘I learn just a little bit more when I see each of these paintings,’ she said.

Her grandfather started out painting scenic landscapes, influenced by impressionism. However, as ‘he was a teacher first and foremost and spent more time with his students,’ he was not able to further develop artistically till much later, according to Jacey.

He founded the Ten-Men Art Group in the 60s, later evolving into the Southeast Asian Art Association. This group comprised artists in Singapore who shared the passion of travelling in the region in search of new themes and inspiration. Yeh Chi Wei and his companions went on six trips to countries across Southeast Asia and the lessons they learned from these trips helped them grow as artists. The Ten-Men Art Group helped Yeh Chi Wei go beyond landscape painting to develop a more personal painting style.

Towards the end of his career, Yue Hann observed that his paintings had become more abstract and the colour schemes more unconventional.

This journey of discovery has proven very meaningful to Jacey. ‘I’m doing this not just to know my grandfather, but to let the rest of Singapore know him,’ Jacey revealed. This process seems to have created a bond between Jacey and her grandfather and she feels personally connected to each of his paintings and everything about his life. During the exhibition opening of Bodies and Relationships: Selected Works of Lee Sik Khoon at NUS Museum, she found that many artists, including Lee Sik Khoon who had joined some of the Ten-Men Art Group expeditions, remembered her grandfather. ‘It was heartwarming,’ said Jacey, proud that her grandfather’s name has in fact lived on.

Preeti Samudra

Jacey with her grandfather’s painting, Dawn at Angkor in NUS Museum

The late Yeh Chi Wei, photograph taken from the catalogue of his first solo exhibition.
At the ancestral home of Tun Dato’ Sir Tan Cheng Lock, where old photos above peranakan antique chairs show a slice of history.

The Working Group had to be careful when they surveyed the peranakan houses along Jalan Tan Cheng Lock as there is no sidewalk along this narrow one-way street.

MALACCA STUDY TRIP: 157 Neil Road – Baba House Project

Located at 157 Neil Rd, the Baba House is one of the last surviving Peranakan houses in Singapore. **When open in mid 2008, visitors will be able to learn about restoration and conservation efforts on this authentic Peranakan structure** and be exposed to history, material culture and customs of the Peranakan community in a living context.

Peter Lee, Honorary Curator of the Baba House, arranged for a one day study trip of Peranakan heritage buildings in Malacca. The working group included Prof Chan Yew Lih (NUS Architecture department), Sally Chua of Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA), Liang Qing Ping of LF Developments (Baba House contractor), and Ahmad Mashadi, Head of NUS Museum.

Jalan Tun Tan Cheng Lock (formerly Heeren Street) is a narrow one-way street flanked by Peranakan houses. We visited No 111, ancestral home of Tun Dato’ Sir Tan Cheng Lock. It provided a glimpse of the past glory of the authentic peranakan building and its interior design and structure. We also visited 113 Heeren Street, a restored peranakan heritage house and were glad that the restorers could answer our neverending questions. URA requested a visit to the oldest temple Cheng Hoon Teng before our next destination at 54/56 Heeren Street, a restoration project of NUS Architect Department headed by Prof Chan. Cheng Hoon Teng Temple underwent a full restoration years back and the intrinsic wooden and wall carvings rightly earned its reputation as one of the treasures in Malacca.

It was 4pm, time for us to head back to Singapore, but we managed to squeeze in a visit to No 8 Heeren Street, a model conservation project by Badan Warisan Malaysia (Heritage of Malaysia Trust). We reached Singapore at 7.30pm... after a rewarding educational trip.
The Art of Sculpture

This seminar on 1 September 2007 is the first in a series of events to lead up to the relaunch of the Ng Eng Teng Collection in January 2008.

What actually goes into the making of a sculpture? Daniele Lamarche-Sarvia, Canadian born sculptor, shared her thoughts about the creative process. The first step is to draw countless sketches until a particular drawing ‘creates a feeling’. We learn that ‘sculptors observe people, feel people and understand people.’ Artworks also reflect the artist’s cultural, social and political background even for non-social commentary pieces. For Daniele, experiencing the Hungry Ghost Festival in a foreign culture is also a source of inspiration for her.

Sketches by the late Ng Eng Teng and his marquettes of Wealth and Contentment were displayed and used as comparison to the actual sculptures standing outside the University Cultural Centre. Participants saw his sculptures on a pre-seminar tour conducted by Foo Su Ling, curator of the Ng Eng Teng Collection. [For the uninitiated, marquettes are smaller versions that are produced before the actual sculptures are made.]

We learn that sculptors choose materials that best express what they want to communicate. The late Ng Eng Teng had used ciment-fondu for Wealth and Contentment. Some will remember them at Plaza Singapura. They were later donated to NUS when the shopping centre underwent renovations. A popular medium for the late sculptor, ciment-fondu was flexible in terms of finish. Eng Teng painted them to create a bronze look. It is also easy to repair if chipped or cracked and can be easily transported. Danielle also discussed other materials – stone, mixed media, bronze, plaster and clay – and the processes of moulding and casting which had to be done in Thailand as there is no foundry in Singapore.

Guest speaker, Sim Lian Huat, who specialises in the creation of larger outdoor sculptures showed us engineering drawings for the Chinese junk copper sculpture that he had built for PSA Building. Environmental, economic and aesthetic considerations were important. Copper was chosen over stainless steel as the latter is a modern element which did not fit in with the long history that PSA wanted to reflect of its organisation. We learned that using bronze would have doubled the cost and the height of the building also influenced the dimensions of the sculpture.

We went away with a better understanding and appreciation of how sculptors create their works from conceptualising, selecting material, modelling and to building the actual sculpture.
SNAP SHOTS

MONTAGE 2007 - The Unforgotten
5-15 Aug

Initiated in 1999, Montage has been the signature event of The Photographic Society of NUS.

The annual exhibition showcasing the winning entries and selected works were showcased at NUS Museum. The Photographic Society also held their Welcome Tea for new members here.

ADOPT-A-BOOK LAUNCH CAMPAIGN
20 Aug

Prof John Wong, Dean of Medicine, with Ms Yong Ying-I, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Health at the Launch of the Adopt-A-Book Campaign at NUS Museum.

The Medical Society of NUS comprising students and the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine started this project to raise funds for needy medical students.

NUSSU HOTLINE TRAINING
8 & 9 Sep

Ms Kiang Whee Fern from Care Corner helped NUSSU Hotline to conduct a training session for new members to handle calls. The group helped promote art appreciation to its members, scheduling time to visit the galleries.

(Photos blurred to maintain confidentiality of members.)
Guided Tours

19 July
Docent Kia Meng explained to Hong Kong students the wonder of woodcut paintings (Highlights of Southeast Asian Collection).

19 July
Su Ling guided Vietnamese students on a tour of Ways of Seeing Chinese Art.

3 Aug
The NUS Graduate Student Society visited Highlights of Southeast Asian Collection as part of their orientation programme.

7 Aug
Museum docent Joan explained the significance of a bronze artefact from the Lee Kong Chian Collection to a student from the Bharati Public School, New Delhi, here on a Student Exchange Program with Xinmin Secondary School.

7 Aug
Xinmin Secondary School students took a close look at the late artist Mohammed Din Mohammad’s Singa Kuda, an installation of horse skull and tail, coconuts and computer stand.

12 Sep
Christine Khor, Director, NUS Centre For the Arts (2nd from right) chatting with Prof Seyed E. Has-nain, Vice Chancellor (centre) and delegates from the University of Hyderabad.
ALVAR AALTO

16 Oct to 8 Dec 07

The exhibition traces the trajectory of Finnish architect Alvar Aalto’s practice by way of 16 one-family houses selected from different points in his extensive career from 1921 to 1976. Shown as part of Singapore Design Festival 2007, the exhibition will also feature interpretations by students from NUS Department of Architecture.

CONNECTIONS

16 Oct to 25 Nov 07

An exhibition featuring artworks by NUS High School students which includes a series of continuous line drawings of ‘Chairs’; an installation art project called ‘Superstring’; the repetitive nature of a sequence of LOMO photographs of the school compound; and a string of images taken from their field trip to Italy.

SOUTH ASIAN ART COLLECTION

10 Dec 07 - 20 Jul 08

This exhibition revisits the Indian sculptures, paintings and textiles donated by the Indian government to the University of Malaya Art Museum in 1959. These ‘artifacts’ not only help uncover the issues and debates surrounding South Asian artistic expressions but also explore contemporary concerns of museological practice in postcolonial societies. This exhibition seeks to relocate these artifacts firstly within contemporary Singapore art discourse and secondly in the Museum’s very own post independence history.

MORE EXHIBITIONS & EVENTS ...

RELAUNCHING OF NG ENG TENG GALLERY
21 Dec 07 – Dec 08

CHINESE CONTEMPORARY ART
21 Dec 07 - 29 Jul 08

THE PUPPET by NUS Chinese Drama
Thur, 18 Oct 07, 6.15pm
NUS Museum
Free Admission
A 45-minute drama in Mandarin by a student group managed by NUS Centre For the Arts.

Check this out:
Collaborative opportunities under the Paper-to-Gallery series at www.nus.edu.sg/museum/paper_gallery.html

Paper-to-Gallery is an exhibition series which enables the academic community to present its research in a comprehensive and visually enriching format. Through this series which emphasizes the development of curatorial methodologies to present research findings, NUS Museum will provide greater public access to the large and expanding works of NUS staff and students.