

For Immediate Release**NUS MUSEUM** presents
In Search of Raffles' Light

An Art Project with Charles Lim

The exhibition opens at the NUS Museum on 24 October 2013 and runs till 27 April 2014.

SINGAPORE, 23 October 2013 – Attempting to remember histories attached to sites related to Singapore's seas, *In Search of Raffles' Light* is an interdisciplinary project guided by the Raffles Lighthouse (estd. 1854) as an evolving metaphor to chart how and where history intersects with the present. Responding to a series of correspondence which outlines the beginnings of a maritime museum in Singapore following independence from the British, this exhibition presents new works developed by Singapore artist Charles Lim, and mobilises everyday objects, museum artefacts, archival texts and maps, photographs, paintings and prints that range from the national to the personal, the archaeological to the biological, and the historical to the present. Understood in this light, the exhibition may be seen as a polyvocal attempt at illuminating the complexities between contemporary practice, museums, and their cultural artefacts.



Photograph of Raffles Lighthouse taken by zoologist Dr Lim Chuan Fong, 1959.

About the Raffles Lighthouse

Built on Pulau Satumu (also known as Coney Island), Raffles Lighthouse was the second lighthouse to be built on the Singapore Straits after the establishment of the Horsburgh Lighthouse in 1854. Since its establishment in December 1855, it has guided ships entering the Singapore Straits from the western entrance and has not only functioned as the southernmost marker of Singapore's territorial waters but also a site of varied significance to its diverse audiences. Today, Raffles Lighthouse is still in operation, but visits are restricted.

The Impetus

Inspired by exchanges with a zoologist who frequented the Raffles Lighthouse in the 1960s and 1970s for his conchological – a branch of zoology dealing with the shells of molluscs – studies, the NUS Museum launched its first *prep-room* | *things that may or may not happen* in 2011 with a focus on the Raffles Lighthouse. The *prep-room* is a fluid, temporary and dialogic space which invites audiences to encounter and measure the propositional aspects of exhibition making and bring their own perspectives to bear on its inquiry. Operating primarily with the archives, the volume and complexity of materials about the Raffles Lighthouse was illustrated with materials ranging from 15th century cartographic maps to 19th century declarations by the Government of the Straits Settlements to establish the Lighthouse, to numerous visual traces amassed from the public archives.

The responses from the visitors to the *prep room*, many of whom had never heard of this marker on the southernmost tip of our borders, and the richness of the material to work with were key factors that encouraged the curatorial team at the NUS Museum to continue the *search* for Raffles' Light.



Film still from video installation by Charles Lim, 2013

Continuing the Search

As visual artist Charles Lim has a passionate appreciation for maritime heritage and is a sailor with a strong affinity for Singapore's waters, the exploration went beyond the confines of the lighthouse. This gave the exhibition a contemporaneous intervention, drawing out custodians of Singapore's maritime heritage, both past and present.

The exhibition takes as one of its points of departure the question of a maritime museum in Singapore and its proposal in the early 1970s. For if Singapore's history is one which continues to be inseparable from the ebbs and flows of the waters surrounding it, what might such a proposed museum have meant for Singapore then, what were the roles and functions demanded of it, and what might an excavation of such a history do for us today? The search for Raffles' Light, therefore, is to be taken as a metaphor which examines the boundaries through

which we frame our imaginations of Singapore, as well as the question concerning a maritime museum in a 'postcolonial' Singapore.

Moving away from definitions of history and heritage as monumental and structured, *In Search of Raffles' Light* highlights the immaterial, mundane, anecdotal and perhaps irreconcilable traces surrounding the site and the artist-curatorial attempts at 'searching' for a critical vocabulary where effective postcolonial histories of Singapore's relationship to the sea may be expressed.

Writings and artefacts have been mobilised from the Raffles Museum of Biodiversity Research (NUS), Singapore Press Holdings, National Archives of Singapore, Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore, Navy Museum and selected private collections.

About the Artist

Charles Lim Yi Yong is a former professional sailor, he graduated from Central Saint Martin's School of Art and Design, London with a B.A. in Fine Art (2001). Lim went on to co-found the seminal net art collective, tsunamii.net, which participated in Documenta11 in Kassel, Germany (2002). Combining his knowledge of the sea and art practice, he then embarked on the SEA STATE series, an ongoing body of work that has been exhibited at Manifesta 7 (2008), the Shanghai Biennale (2008), and most recently at the Singapore Biennale (2011). Lim's moving image works have been screened at the International Film Festival Rotterdam, the Tribeca Film Festival and the Edinburgh Film Festival. His 2011 short film *All The Lines Flow Out* premiered at the 68th Venice Film Festival, winning a Special Mention, the first award ever won there by a Singaporean production. The piece has since received three more awards at other international festivals.

About the Curators

Shabbir Hussain Mustafa is curator at The National Art Gallery, Singapore who began his career at NUS Museum. His research interests are in modern Southeast Asian history. Within the broader framework of the archival-curatorial method being developed at the NUS Museum, his approach has centered heavily on deploying archival texts as ploys in engaging different modes of thinking and writing, all in an attempt to open up the archive to multivariate struggles of perception and reading. Some exhibitions that Mustafa has curated include: *Persistent Visions | Erika Tan* (2009); *Archives and Desires: Selections from the Mohammad Din Mohammad Collection* (2009); *Camping and Tramping through the Colonial Archive: The Museum in Malaya* (2011); *Writing Power | Zulkifli Yusoff* (2011); and most recently, *Semblance/Presence: Renato Habulan and Alfredo Esquillo Jr* (2012).

Kenneth Tay is an assistant curator at the NUS Museum in charge of the Ng Eng Teng Collection. He is interested in the intersections between the histories and theories of photography and of the moving image not so much for what they say about their respective medium specifically, but how they may be mobilised to engage with the different ways of seeing at large.

Fiona Tan is currently working at the National Archives of Singapore. Since her internship at the NUS Museum in 2010, when she researched for *Camping and Tramping Through the Colonial Archive: The Museum in Malaya* (2010 – 2013), she has been working on various late 19th century and early 20th century colonial sources for both academic and exhibitionary purposes. She continues to revel in the open-ended possibilities of the colonial archives in generating unconventional histories and exhibits, such as the Raffles Light project.

Exhibition Details

Exhibition period: 24 October 2013 – 27 April 2014

Venue: NUS Museum
 University Cultural Centre
 50 Kent Ridge Crescent
 National University of Singapore
 Singapore 119279

Opening hours: 10am – 7.30pm (Tuesdays – Saturdays)
 10 am – 6pm (Sundays)
 Closed on Mondays and Public Holidays

Admission: Free

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 Website: www.nus.edu.sg/cfa

Enquiries

For more information on the exhibition, media interviews, publications, gallery tours or high-resolution images, contact:

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About NUS Museum

NUS Museum is a comprehensive Museum for teaching and research. It focuses on Asian regional art and culture, and seeks to create an enriching experience through its collections and exhibitions. The Museum has over 8,000 artefacts and artworks divided across four collections. The **Lee Kong Chian Collection** consists of a wide representation of Chinese materials from ancient to contemporary art, the **South and Southeast Asian Collection** holds a range of works from Indian classical sculptures to modern pieces; and the **Ng Eng Teng Collection** is a donation from the late Singapore sculptor and Cultural Medallion recipient of over 1,000 artworks. A fourth collection, the **Straits Chinese Collection**, is located at NUS Baba House at 157 Neil Road.

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