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Art and history buff Lucille Yap (left) is passionate about her job as senior curator at the Singapore Philatelic Museum

By GERALDINE TAN

FAR from simply being disposable and forgettable, stamps and other philatelic paraphernalia are beautiful works of art as well as excellent markers of time and history.

"Stamps are excellent archival tools," says Singapore Philatelic Museum senior curator Lucille Yap. "For example, they document national milestones. They are, basically, historical documents in visual form."

"There are so many different, unusual ones," she continues. "At the museum, we use them to share different themes or information with our visitors."

Together with another curator, the 46-year-old is responsible for all the permanent and changing exhibits at the museum, which opened in 1994. Ms Yap has been with the museum since day one and even helped with planning, renovating and opening it.

"I have always been interested in history, archaeology and art, and curating was always something I wanted to do, even while I was still at school," says the National University of Singapore (NUS) history graduate.

Her first taste of the field came at the National Museum, where she was the curator of its art gallery. Later, she moved on to the Singapore Discovery Centre,

before being roped in to help draw up the masterplan for the current National Museum and Singapore Art Museum.

However, Ms Yap found that she missed curating and joined the Singapore Philatelic Museum in 1994.

She now oversees between three and four exhibitions a year. Occasionally, she curates, consults for and manages projects outside the museum.

"I enjoy doing museum work," she says of her return to familiar ground. "I like meeting people, networking with the philatelic circle, thinking up programmes to connect with the audience and interacting with my peers and visitors to the museum."

It is a job with varied demands, depending on the stage of the project at hand. There is a lot of work to be done before final installation. Says Ms Yap: "I may be researching, looking for information and materials, studying the collection, developing a design approach and the exhibition's overall concept, or speaking with collectors and liaising with designers."

The curatorial aspect of her job involves conceptualising and developing exhibitions. "One must study the collection well, to understand what we want to achieve and come up with the materials to get the message across," says Ms Yap.

Then there is the acquisition of materials, artefacts and exhibits, either through

purchase, donation or loan from collectors. "In sourcing for these things I have to network a lot, and keep in touch with the philatelic circle," she explains.

Once she has all the hardware she needs, Ms Yap then has to examine the collection, and think of ways to share the information with the target audience, and help them interpret the exhibition. "Each exhibition must be informative, with useful educational tools," she points out.

"Managing the resources in a small museum like ours is a challenge," she says. "We have to make the most of what we have by stretching the imagination, being innovative and staying positive."

"This is a job that requires a lot of co-ordination and project management. You will find yourself dealing with different people, both internally and externally."

Ms Yap adds that a clear vision, good storyboarding and research skills, as well as the ability to visualise the finished product, will serve would-be curators well. "It is a bonus if you come from an art background, and have a keen eye for aesthetics," she adds.

Above all, Ms Yap says the most important must-have is a keen interest in the arts and heritage field. "At the end of the day, it is the passion for the job that will keep you going. One success will motivate you to go on and do better work."



PHOTOS: JAMIE KOH