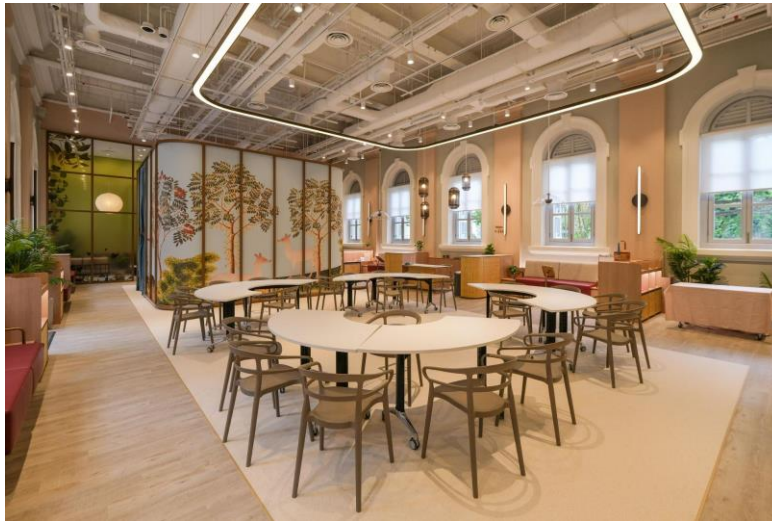


MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

National Museum of Singapore opens *Reunion* – the first purpose-built social space for seniors in a local museum

Designed with the support of Lien Foundation and inputs from the community, Reunion seeks to provide a museum-based intervention that embraces social inclusion, health and well-being goals for seniors, including those with mild cognitive impairment and dementia.



Reunion. Image Courtesy of National Museum of Singapore.

Singapore, 11 April 2023 – The National Museum of Singapore has created the first purpose-built dedicated social space for seniors in a local museum, in partnership with Lien Foundation. Named *Reunion*, the space opens on 13 April 2023 and will support the museum’s initiatives for seniors, to encourage meaningful conversations and activities using the museum’s collection and exhibition galleries. The space, which comprises a café and an activity space, was conceptualised as part of a collaboration between both organisations to support the health and well-being of seniors, including those living with mild cognitive impairment and dementia. The activity space features a group activity area, an immersive projection cave, a Quiet Room, and music booths, to encourage group activity during the museum’s programmes for seniors and also enhance their museum-visiting experience.

2 With Singapore having one of the fastest-ageing populations in the world and an increasing incidence of persons diagnosed with dementia, this timely collaboration seeks to support the growing needs of the growing community, in line with the recently announced 2023 Action Plan for Successful Ageing. It is also part of Our SG Heritage Plan’s overall efforts to reach out to underserved communities such as seniors with mild cognitive impairment and dementia, and foster an age-friendly museum sector.

3 Chung May Khuen, Director of the National Museum said, “As a people’s museum, we continuously seek to cultivate inclusion and social connectedness among our visitors of diverse backgrounds and age groups, including seniors. We have continually worked with like-minded partners to present meaningful programmes and resources for seniors and their caregivers. To enhance these offerings, we embarked on a series of focus group discussions and engagements with stakeholders, and explored the possibility of a dedicated, museum-based space to provide greater opportunities for cognitive engagement and social interaction amongst seniors. *Reunion* reflects the museum’s continued commitment to accessibility and inclusivity, and with the Lien Foundation’s support for this project, we are looking forward to partnering our social and health care sector to create a more welcoming environment at the museum for our seniors, who have themselves played an integral role in the stories we present in our galleries.”

A place for seniors to connect



Senior-friendly workshops at the Activity Space. Image Courtesy of National Museum of Singapore.

4 Befitting its name, *Reunion* provides a space for seniors to build relationships with old and new friends, as well as to relax and be rejuvenated from the day-to-day routine. Seniors can look forward to reconnecting with the past and relating their own stories and experiences with each

other through programmes organised in the activity space. They can also enjoy wholesome meals and conversations in the adjacent café space. To participate in the museum's programmes, seniors and their caregivers may refer to the museum's website for information and to register for the programmes.

5 Designed to resemble a space that feels like our home, *Reunion* exudes a sense of warmth through the choice of colours in the activity and café spaces as well as the natural lighting that comes in through the windows, which allow people to look out and enjoy the surrounding greenery. The space includes ample seating for seniors, and the choice of rattan weave on the cabinetry and parts of the interior pay homage to our local heritage. Elements of nature are also incorporated into the overall design, featuring the museum's prized natural history collection on the walls of the activity and the café spaces. *Reunion* seeks to provide a warm and welcoming space for seniors to enjoy programmes within the museum and encourage them to further explore the museum building and its rich collection that can support their well-being.

6 *Reunion* was designed by the National Museum's partner and architectural consultant, RSP Architects Planners and Engineers, in consultation with seniors (including seniors with dementia and their caregivers) and partners from the health and social care sectors that include DementiaSG, Apex Harmony Lodge, Peacehaven, and health care professionals (doctors and occupational therapists) from both the private and public sectors. The design team from RSP conducted research to ensure that the space is senior- and dementia-friendly, and together with the museum, engaged stakeholders throughout the design process. The stakeholders helped to choose the activity and dining chairs, colour of the entrance cove of *Reunion* and the interior, and even the flooring for the space, from a selection identified by RSP.

7 Law Yoke Foong, Executive Director, RSP shared, "Designing for seniors with dementia and mild cognitive impairment is often a quite specialised subject, which RSP has experience in through our healthcare projects. The challenge is in applying this experience out of the medical setting and onto the public space, and to also question how we can build this for our families in our own homes. To ensure our design stood up to real-world application, we combined our experience and expertise, and incorporated institutional research together with input gleaned from engagements with professionals and caregivers involved at every stage, from design to construction. The priceless interactions not only resulted in a functional space for the intended

users and their programmes, but also truly turned *Reunion* into a home for all seniors where their insights shined through.”

Multimedia features for collaborative interaction



Facilities and features at Reunion. Image Courtesy of National Museum of Singapore.

8 To uplift one’s spirits, seniors can play and enjoy familiar tunes from different genres and eras at music booths or look forward to learning something new – be it a skill or information about Singapore – through the programmes presented by the museum at the adaptable activity space where hands-on creative activities will be conducted. *Reunion* will also feature an interactive and immersive *Memory Lane* experience facilitated by the museum’s volunteers during a programme, where seniors can jointly curate a digital exhibition with others, inspired by their visit to the museum galleries and by the museum’s collection.

9 Apart from being the first dedicated social space in a local museum, *Reunion* is among the National Heritage Board (NHB)’s first projects to include multimedia features that tap on the latest 5G connectivity and edge computing solutions to deliver audio-visual experiences in real-time, as part of NHB’s digitalisation plans. The interface for the multimedia experience has been designed to be senior-friendly – such as having larger fonts, ensuring sufficient contrast between the text and the background, and having shorter and clearer instructions. This process involved consulting seniors in the design process, carrying out user testing and improving the interface based on the users’ feedback.

A space of relaxation and empowerment



Dedicated Quiet Room in Reunion. Image Courtesy of National Museum of Singapore.

10 Visitors who are susceptible to sensory disturbances and mood changes may choose to visit the dedicated Quiet Room in *Reunion* for a calmer environment, before resuming their activities. Visitors can also round up their day with a visit to the National Museum’s latest eatery, Café Brera at Reunion, where they can enjoy fresh bakes and wholesome food suitable for seniors, over hearty conversations. At Café Brera, visitors can also order dysphagia-friendly food which are suitable for people with swallowing difficulties. A majority of the Café Brera team also comprises seniors, as the café welcomes them to work, mingle, contribute and do things together. Inspired by Japan’s “The Restaurant of Mistaken Orders”, which seeks to create awareness and understanding for dementia, Café Brera and the National Museum likewise hope to empower seniors and contribute to an inclusive society. In the months to come, the National Museum and Café Brera will offer food programmes that encourage healthy eating, especially among seniors to support their well-being.

11 While *Reunion* is developed for seniors, the café is open to all visitors. Seniors, and all other visitors, can also walk in and enjoy the music booths or virtual exhibitions in the space before continuing their exploration of the museum, especially on days when there are no programmes being held in the activity space.

Championing museums for social prescription

12 With *Reunion*, the museum hopes to provide non-medical intervention to support the health and well-being of seniors living with mild cognitive impairment and dementia, making a

case for museums for social prescription in Singapore. In developing *Reunion* and the accompanying programmes, the museum has referred to the United Kingdom (UK)'s experience, where some museums offer programmes for seniors and seniors with dementia and are part of the UK's social prescribing network that supports the health and well-being of its people. The museum will be incorporating the learning points gleaned from the UK examples into the design of its programmes for seniors – such as offering opportunities for new learning alongside reminiscing to cognitively engage seniors with dementia; including a variety of activities within a programme to cater to the different interests and levels of attention spans; and continuing the engagement of seniors beyond a programme, either by inviting them to regular programmes for seniors at the museum or signposting them to other similar institutions. More importantly, the National Museum hopes that *Reunion*, similarly to the museums in the UK, can contribute towards the diversity of platforms in catering to the needs of our seniors—through the unique connection between culture and healthcare.

13 The museum conducted site visits to various senior spaces around Singapore, within the healthcare setting and in the community, to conceptualise *Reunion* as a dedicated social space for seniors in a museum setting. The design of the space and programme was guided by a set of experience principles, which was developed in consultation with various stakeholders. The museum also carried out the prototyping of programmes so as to try out a variety of activities to cater to the varying interests of seniors, while providing opportunities for social interaction, cognitive stimulation, and opportunities for new learning. These programmes included conversational gallery tours that were facilitated by the museum's Care Facilitator volunteers, storytelling and drama workshops, and craft activities.

14 Associate Professor Lee Kheng Hock, Deputy Chief Executive Officer (Education & Community Partnerships) commented, "SingHealth Community Hospitals introduced social prescribing in 2019 to improve the health and well-being of our patients through participatory arts and social activities that reconnect them to their community. We have seen the potential of social prescribing in improving the well-being for elderly who are socially isolated. The museum is like a repository of our community's collective memory and experiences and is an important community asset that can potentially connect and restore meaning to the memories of individuals. We are happy to learn that our National Museum is supporting social prescribing with this very meaningful project."

15 Lee Poh Wah, CEO of Lien Foundation, added, “What we often perceive to be heritage today is, in fact, the childhood and shared experiences of our seniors. That’s why the cultural heritage sector is a natural ally in building a caring community for an ageing population. It owns assets that connect and renew, often when little else does. Heritage strengthens human health and potential, because that comes more easily when one has identity, and a sense of place and belonging.”



*Seniors participating in Reunion’s programmes.
Image Courtesy of National Museum of Singapore.*

16 As a first step, *Reunion* will focus on seniors living with mild cognitive impairment and dementia with the introduction of *Refresh and Reconnect!*, a new eight-week signature non-medical heritage-based intervention programme. This includes gallery tours led by the museum’s Care Facilitator volunteers and complementary hands-on activities that feature different art forms to encourage new learning among participants. An in-depth evaluation will be held to assess its impact and effectiveness, informing the National Museum’s future collaborations and programming with the cultural and health sectors. This complements the National Museum’s ongoing accessible programming such as Quiet Mornings, monthly senior-friendly tours and activities in conjunction with the museum’s special exhibitions, which will be held at *Reunion*.

17 For more information, please visit www.nhb.gov.sg/nationalmuseum or the National Museum’s Facebook and Instagram pages. Media materials including images of the senior space can be accessed [here](#).

- **Annex A: Overview of the Components of *Reunion***
- **Annex B: Programmes at *Reunion***

- **Annex C: Architectural Information about *Reunion***



A space developed by



An institution of



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About the National Museum of Singapore

With a history dating back to 1887, the National Museum of Singapore is the nation's oldest museum, with galleries that adopt multi-perspective ways of presenting history and culture. A cultural and architectural landmark in Singapore, the Museum presents thought-provoking exhibitions involving critically important collections of artefacts that tells the story of Singapore and the world, as well as hosts innovative festivals and events all year round – including the dynamic Night Festival and visually arresting art installations. The programming is supported by a wide range of facilities and services including F&B, retail, and a Resource Centre. The National Museum of Singapore re-opened in December 2006 after a three-year redevelopment. It refreshed its permanent galleries and re-opened them in September 2015 for Singapore's Golden Jubilee. In 2022, it celebrated its 135th anniversary. For more details, please visit www.nationalmuseum.sg.

About Lien Foundation

The Lien Foundation is a Singapore philanthropic house noted for its model of radical philanthropy. It breaks new ground by investing in innovative solutions, convening strategic partnerships and catalysing action at the intersection of health and social care. For more information, visit www.lienfoundation.org.

ANNEX A

Overview of the Components of *Reunion*

Reunion comprises an activity space and a café (Café Brera at Reunion). The key components of the activity space are:

1. Music booths – The music booths are created for seniors to enjoy familiar tunes. Based on research, music can help one to feel happier, feel safe and calm, recall fond memories and connect with others.



Music Booth. Image Courtesy of National Museum of Singapore.

2. Memory Lane immersive cave experience – The Memory Lane immersive cave experience is designed for seniors to curate their own virtual exhibition as part of a facilitated group programme. When a programme is not in session, visitors are welcomed to step in and view the virtual exhibitions created by participants.



Memory Lane. Image Courtesy of National Museum of Singapore.

3. Activity area – The activity area comprises loose furniture that can be rearranged for different types of activities from hands-on craft activities to lecture style seating, to an empty space for music and movement sessions.



Activity Area. Image Courtesy of National Museum of Singapore.

4. Quiet Room – The Quiet Room is designed to provide seniors to regulate in a relaxing environment before resuming their activity in *Reunion*.



Quiet Room. Image Courtesy of National Museum of Singapore.

Reunion opens daily from 9am to 6pm, and the café opens daily from 9am to 5pm.

ANNEX B

Programmes at Reunion

The following are some of the programmes that will be conducted by the museum in *Reunion*.

Programmes	Information
<i>Refresh and Reconnect!</i>	<p>A new 8-week signature programme to offer a non-medical heritage-based intervention programme for seniors living with mild cognitive impairment and dementia, followed by an in-depth evaluation to assess its impact and effectiveness.</p> <p>The 8-week long programme will be held over consecutive weeks and will be about 1.5 hours in duration for each session. The sessions will include guided gallery tours led by the museum’s Care Facilitator volunteers and artist-led hands-on activities based on various art forms (e.g. music and movement, craft etc.) to encourage new learning among participants, while leveraging the museum’s collection to spark reminiscence conversations.</p>
Quiet Mornings	<p>The museum has designated the first Saturday of every month (9am to 11am), and the first and third Thursdays of each month (9am to 12 noon), as Quiet Mornings. Visitors who would appreciate a quieter and more relaxing environment are welcome to visit the museum during Quiet Mornings. All galleries will be open to visitors from 9am (as compared to usual opening hours from 10am).</p> <p>For updated dates for Quiet Mornings, click here.</p>
Senior-friendly Tours	<p>Senior-friendly tours are held every first Saturday of the Month. To sign up for tours, click here.</p> <p><i>Pre-registration is required. Tour limited to 8 pax.</i></p>

Annex C

Architectural Information about *Reunion*

Overall: Site

Reunion occupies a space that is approximately 290sqm. As it is also part of the National Museum's historic building that is gazetted as a National Monument, the works that touch the monument building are also guided by the Preservation Guidelines.

Prior to *Reunion*, the space was used primarily as a blackbox for multimedia installations, as such the windows were hoarded up in the interior and the room was dark. Acoustically, the space was not ideal due to the general lack of treatment. These observations were verified by stakeholders who shared similar sentiments during some of the earlier engagement sessions held in the space. Hence, the space required major redesign.

The Concept

Functionally, *Reunion* is conceptualised both as an activity space for senior-oriented programmes, but also as a general drop-in social space where seniors can go alone or with their family, friends, and caregivers. *Reunion* will house various elements that users can interact with, including an immersive cave (known as *Memory Lane*) that allows users to curate their own exhibition, music booths where users can enjoy a curated collection of music, and objects from the museum's handling collection that users can engage with. Adjacent to the activity space is a café that offers food that is senior friendly, offers employment opportunities and collaborates with the museum to offer food-centric programmes for seniors.

In one such programme, the museum plans to lead seniors on a conversational tour of its galleries before bringing them to *Reunion* to share their experience and thoughts arising from the tour, engage in some group tactile activities, and try their hand at curating their own digital exhibition.

Spatially, RSP conceptualised to coalesce all these disparate requirements and programmes by turning *Reunion* into a home away from home—a comfortable, familiar, and forgiving respite where its occupants feel safe, at ease and empowered to be themselves. It is a place that grows with its occupants through use and adaptation, and where one can relax, learn, and socialise.

Each component in *Reunion* is loosely associated with four key residential spaces:

- The main activity area as living room
- The Memory Lane immersive cave as the home's study
- The café as the kitchen and dining room
- The Quiet Room for decompression takes inspiration from the bedroom

The design team was also keen to employ familiar design language associated with Singapore homes that will not only lend cultural context to the design but also transform the neo-classical, heritage space into a much more homely, accessible, and relatable one for the everyday people. Additionally, the design incorporates artworks of animals, plants, and fruits from the museum's prized William Farquhar Collection of Natural History Drawings.

The Design

Departing from the primary use of pristine white paint throughout the museum, *Reunion* employs a variety of colours to transport the users to a warmer and much homier environment. Each space bears its own colour identity, making colour association, recall and navigation easier.

Activity Area

The activity area is imagined to be a large open-plan circular Living Room lined with built-in cabinets displaying homey paraphernalia and six settees to accommodate different groups of people as well as provide options of location. The Living Room's open and looped circulation allows easy visual connection and navigation across the space. The activity space comprises:

- An activity area, where loose furniture can be arranged for different activities, such as craft, music, and movement, or even lecture style.
- An immersive cave that has a long settee set against the wall with rattan finishes and adorned by sconce lamps. Within the cave is a 3-walled LED screen that will display the Memory Lane experience, where seniors could design their own virtual exhibition in a programme facilitated by the museum. Two armchairs and coffee tables accompany the settee to encourage better interaction amongst users and facilitators during the group activity.
- Two music booths that have overhead dome speakers and a pull-out coffee table.
- A Quiet Room for seniors who may feel overwhelmed, to retreat to, before resuming activities in *Reunion* sits behind a lightly frosted glass wall. The wall allows others to know

when the space is occupied, and for caregivers to easily check to ensure that no incidents have occurred.

Café Space

The café space is split into the Kitchen and Dining Room by a glass partition that provides visual porosity. The Dining Room is designed with a few dining seating options, from low counter seating that allows diners to view into the kitchen, to a table along the exterior wall for more introspective dining, and more typical dining tops that can be combined into larger settings for big group dining or museum programmes. Furniture was selected to not only provide options but based on the ease of use for seniors with differing physical needs: the counter's barstool is low enough for easy mounting and dismounting by seniors, and two types of dining chairs (with and without armrest) are available for use. The ones with arm rest provide support for seniors to push themselves up while getting up, while the ones without arm rest are helpful for seniors who may either need some assistance getting in and out of their seats or prefer to turn to the side before standing up.

The Dining Room's servery is kept to a low profile so that staff and diners are ensured face-to-face interactions and ease in exchanging exchange goods and payment. The dining tables are set out to allow for sufficient space for persons on wheelchairs to move about.