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National Museum opens after \$132m makeover

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Arts correspondent

WITH six pairs of scissors swishing through an orange satin ribbon, the revamped National Museum of Singapore was opened officially last night.

Guest of honour President S R Nathan and Information, Communications and the Arts Minister Lee Boon Yang were among those who did the honours.

About 1,000 guests then tucked into a buffet dinner in the museum's glass-clad atrium under a row of swinging red chandeliers, a mechanised artwork by Singapore artist Suzann Victor.

Among the guests was Mrs Sylvia Kho, 89, Singapore's Vera Wang between the 1960s and the 1990s.

She retired 13 years ago and donated a collection of her bridal gowns to the museum. One of them is now on display.

Mr William Guy Farquhar Atkins, 40, the great-great-grandson of Lieutenant-Colonel William Farquhar, Singapore's first British Resident, was also present.

The Bristol-based managing director of a specialised safety equipment company last visited the museum in 2003, before it closed for renovations.

"It's a fantastic combination of the old and new," he said after a tour.

The 119-year-old museum was closed for 3½ years for a \$132.6 million facelift.

It now has a main Singapore History Gallery and four Living Galleries, which showcase Singapore culture through film, photography, food and fashion.

In a speech, Dr Lee said the refurbished museum was "a beautiful crucible for forging a love for our heritage while retaining the charm and character of this historical monument".

The landmark plays a big role in raising Singapore's profile as a global city for arts and culture, he added.

Describing the museum as an "architectural icon" of Singapore, the chairman of the National Heritage Board, Professor Tommy Koh, said: "I hope the people of Singapore will embrace it in the same way as they have embraced the Esplanade."

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PHOTO: LAU FOOK KONG

GRAND DAME'S NEW LOOK: The 119-year-old museum's re-opening featured a still from home-grown film-maker Royston Tan's new film *Sin Sai Hong* projected on its revamped facade.