

## MEDIA RELEASE

*For immediate release*

### REFLECT ON THE PAST AND REIMAGINE THE FUTURE AT THE MALAY HERITAGE CENTRE'S NEW *CERITA* EXHIBITION



*Kampong Gelam (1949 - 1954) by Latiff Mohidin  
(Image credits to Latiff Mohidin and National Gallery Singapore)*

**Singapore, 26 January 2022** – If a picture paints a thousand words, what more the artefacts at the Malay Heritage Centre’s (MHC) latest exhibition, which are related to the Malay community, collected over the past decade? From 29 January till 31 July 2022, ***Cerita***, meaning “stories” in Malay, will shine the spotlight on the stories and narratives of life in the *Nusantara* (Malay Archipelago) in a final show that marks the Centre’s last before it closes its doors for a revamp later this year.

2 Located in the heart of the bustling Kampong Gelam precinct, MHC has functioned as a vital focal point for the Malay community in Singapore since its official opening in 2005. Since reopening in 2012, the Centre’s many exhibitions, festivals and programmes continue to be anchored in and driven by an unwavering belief in the importance of ‘sharing stories’, offering new perspectives and connecting communities. *Cerita* will serve to draw together all the stories that

the Centre has told so far in a retrospective showcase, calling upon its visitors to reflect on the past and reimagine a new future together. The *Cerita* special exhibition complements the Centre's annual **Malay CultureFest**, which will feature an assortment of performances, workshops and forums held both onsite and online.

3 Ms Asmah Alias, General Manager of MHC said, "Over the years, MHC has continuously strived to encourage reflection and discussion on what constitutes the Singaporean Malay identity and culture through our array of exhibitions and programmes. *Cerita* represents the culmination of all our efforts over the past decade towards this mission, and is a timely occasion to spark new conversations on the valuable stories of the community as we approach the planned museum revamp. *Cerita* and *Malay CultureFest 2022* also hope to honour the many communities who have been working closely with us all these years, and we look forward to even more collaborations in the future."

#### A collection of stories over the past decade

4 Featuring new artefacts alongside highlights of past exhibitions hosted by MHC over the years, *Cerita* will indulge both returning and new visitors with two curated galleries: *Kita* (Gallery 1) and *Me-reka* (Gallery 2), both of which aim to inspire new insights and perspectives on Malay culture and heritage. The special exhibition will showcase over 80 exhibits, including artefacts from the National Collection, as well as loans from international institutions and various community contributors.



*Congkak set with bird motif (Image credits to the National Heritage Board)*

5 The *Kita* gallery, meaning “us” in Malay, will cast a fresh lens on the local Malay community and provide a more nuanced understanding of the extent of interconnectedness, and therefore influence, of communities in the *Nusantara* on Malay culture here in Singapore. Through a selection of exhibits that highlight the everyday life, customs and traditions of the Malays, visitors can deepen their understanding of Malay history and gain renewed appreciation of the stories that the Malay community have to tell. Highlights of the artefacts on display in *Kita* include an intricate ceremonial circumcision chair from the early 1900s that was used in *Berkhatan* ceremonies conducted by the Malay nobility in Yogyakarta; a hand-drawn map of the Kampong Gelam precinct based on artist Latiff Mohidin’s childhood memories in Singapore; and an early to mid-20th century *Congkak* set which serves as the vessel for the popular game played throughout the Malay Archipelago in the 1970s. *Congkak* is believed to have originated from the Middle East and spread throughout the *Nusantara* through merchants who visited trading ports in the region, and most notably, the ports along the Straits of Malacca.

6 The second gallery, *Me-reka*, which means “crafting” in Malay, will illuminate the craft traditions that exist within the diverse cultural influences of the *Nusantara* and thereby spotlight the ingenuity of early craftsmen in contributing to a rich legacy of material culture, some of which are still in use today. Featuring artefacts that showcase unique craft traditions – from writing to textiles as well as food and music – of the Malay world, *Me-reka* hopes to convey the stories of communal heritage, identity and histories that have shaped both the intellectual and cultural discourses within the community. Some highlights that visitors can look out for include the *Adana* manual printer which birthed a new era in Singapore’s publishing industry in the 1950s; a *rebab* (a string instrument) and its accompanying bow which was used as part of *main puteri*, a traditional healing performance that was believed to cure patients of emotional and spiritual ailments; and a *Garuda* costume for the *Tari Golek Menak* (dance of the rod puppet), a classical Yogyakarta dance that first appeared in the early 1940s and was inspired from the *Wayang Golek Menak* (rod puppet theatre).

7 MHC also worked closely with 50 students and lecturers from the Nanyang Polytechnic (NYP) School of Design & Media over 18 weeks to produce 10 digital animation videos based on the classical Malay folklore of *The Attack of the Garfish*, a popular story from the *Sejarah Melayu*

(Malay Annals). These digital animation works will be displayed as part of the *Cerita* special exhibition, and highlight the fresh and engaging perspectives of the younger generation in retelling Malay history.

### A celebration of the evolution of Malay culture in Singapore

8 Spanning three weekends from 28 January to 13 February 2022, *Malay CultureFest 2022* will take the stage with on-site and online activities that celebrate Malay culture in Singapore and its intricate links to the *Nusantara*. Touching on the richness, diversity and cross-cultural influences that define the parameters of traditional Malay arts today, *Malay CultureFest* parallels the themes of *Cerita* with a focus on honoring the past while providing a means for present-day expression.

9 Highlights of *Malay CultureFest 2022* include:

- ***In Celebration of Sri Warisan at Taman Warisan*** – A ‘docu-edutainment’ type performance which will showcase performing arts company Sri Warisan’s journey at MHC, since the beginning of the pre-opening of the Centre in 2002. Sri Warisan will be performing historical songs such as “*Citra Bangsa in Kampong Gelam*” which showcases the history of immigrants who came to Kampong Gelam, as well as “*Lestari seni di Taman Warisan*”, a royal dance and also a song used to welcome guests and tourists who came to MHC with the use of *Cembul Emas* (a small pot from a *sirih* set to hold gambier, areca nut or other ingredients used in preparing a betel quid) props. Both songs were composed by local composer Mr Zubir Abdullah.
- ***Lintas Nusantara x Silat: Balada Nusantara*** – The 10th installation of *Lintas Nusantara* is a love letter to *silat* – an ancient martial arts form practiced across the *Nusantara*. Over two showcases, audiences can explore *silat*’s influence on dance in the region through magnetic performances such as “*Dauliti, Singapura*” and “*Silat and the Bawean Community*”.

- **Bangsawan Workshop** – An immersive workshop experience where participants can practice their flair for acting and learn various character archetypes found in the traditional Malay *Bangsawan*, a type of Malay opera or theatre accompanied by music and dance.

10 For more information about *Cerita* and *Malay CultureFest 2022*, please refer to the following:

- [Annex A](#): List of highlight artefacts for *Cerita*
- [Annex B](#): List of programmes for *Malay CultureFest 2022*

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### **About the Malay Heritage Centre**

The Malay Heritage Centre (MHC) is housed in the former Istana Kampong Gelam, which was gazetted as a National Monument in 2015. The centre showcases the history, culture and contributions of the Malay community within the context of Singapore's history and multi-cultural society. MHC's permanent galleries focus on the history of Kampong Gelam and feature an array of artefacts from the National Collection and the Malay community. Through its exhibitions and programmes, the Centre aspires to be a vibrant destination of historical and cultural significance for both Singaporeans and international visitors. The Malay Heritage Centre is a heritage institution managed by the National Heritage Board. More information on MHC may be found at this website [www.malayheritage.org.sg](http://www.malayheritage.org.sg)

### **About the Malay Heritage Foundation**

The Malay Heritage Foundation was established on 28 July 1999 to promote the study, research, and the public's understanding and knowledge of the historical and socio-cultural development of the Malay community in Singapore, through the Malay Heritage Centre and other relevant means.





A Heritage Institution of  
**National  
Heritage  
Board**

Since its inception, it has worked with various segments of the Malay and Singapore community, government agencies, philanthropists and entrepreneurs to further its cause.

### **About the National Heritage Board**

The National Heritage Board (NHB) was formed on 1 August 1993. As the custodian of Singapore's heritage, NHB is responsible for telling the Singapore story, sharing the Singaporean experience, and imparting our Singapore spirit.

NHB's mission is to preserve and celebrate the shared heritage of our diverse communities, for the purpose of education, nation-building and cultural understanding. It manages the national museums and heritage institutions and sets policies relating to heritage sites, monuments and the national collection. Through the national collection, NHB curates heritage programmes and presents exhibitions to connect the past, present and future generations of Singaporeans. NHB is a statutory board under the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth. Please visit [www.nhb.gov.sg](http://www.nhb.gov.sg) for more information.

**Cerita (Stories) Special Exhibition**


Date: 29 January to 31 July 2022



Time: 10am – 6pm

(last admission at 5.30pm, and closed on Mondays)

Over the years, MHC has presented an array of exhibitions and programmes along the four thematic categories of *Bahasa* (Language), *Adat* (Culture & Customs), *Nilai* (Values) and *Bangsa* (People/Nation). At the heart of this approach was the desire to promote discussions on who are the Malays i.e Melayu, what is the ‘Malay language’, and survey Malay culture through cultural and heritage materials from the vast *Nusantara* or Malay Archipelago.

Envisioned more as a pit-stop on a journey that will continue after the planned museum revamp, this exhibition is a timely occasion for all of us to reflect on the past and imagine the future together. *Cerita* shines the spotlight on the shared stories as well as the role of the storyteller via a survey of selected artefacts and signature collaborations that MHC has presented over the past decade. Guided by the two signposts of *Kita* (Us/ We) in Gallery 1, and *Me-reka* (Them/Crafting) in Gallery 2, this exhibition hopes to indulge both returning and new visitors, to discover fresh insights and perspectives on Malay culture and heritage.

Artefact	Description
<b>Gallery 1 – <i>Kita</i></b>	
	<p><b>Latiff Mohidin</b>  <b><i>Kampong Gelam (1949 -1954)</i></b>  <b>Pencil and ink on Tibetan paper</b>  <b>A Gift from Latiff Mohidin to the People of Kampong Gelam</b>  <b>Collection of National Gallery Singapore</b></p> <p>Malaysian artist Latiff Mohidin once mentioned that he undertook painting trips with well-known artists: “On Sundays, I would walk from Java Road to Bussorah Street and onto the Arab Street Junction, arriving at the end of Beach Road.”</p> <p>This hand-drawn map was produced based on his childhood memories growing up in Singapore. It tells a personal story of how Latiff saw Kampong Gelam</p>

	<p>of the past, what the intersecting streets meant to its residents and how the precinct has changed over the last few decades.</p>
	<p><b>Pilgrim passes for adults embarking on the Hajj pilgrimage</b></p> <p><b>1978   Singapore   On loan from the family of Hajjah Mahiran Abdul Rahman</b></p> <p>Kampong Gelam once functioned as one of the most important pilgrim ports in the Islamic world. From at least the 1830s up to the 1970s, Kampong Gelam was the focal point for the Hajj industry in the <i>Nusantara</i> with the <i>kapal haji</i> (Hajj ships) leaving for Jeddah, Saudi Arabia from Singapore. Due to this status, Kampong Gelam became a bustling Hajj port with many businessmen setting up numerous businesses, such as lodging houses and travel brokering services, to serve the Hajj pilgrims from all over the <i>Nusantara</i>.</p> <p>These two pilgrim passes belong to the family of Hajjah Maimunah, the founder of the eatery, <i>Hjh Maimunah Restaurant &amp; Catering</i>, located in Kampong Gelam. Hajjah Maimunah was also the first female <i>sheikh haji</i> (Hajj broker) in a male-dominated industry. An interesting addition to this group of passports is the Hajj pass belonging to a 9-year-old girl, Halimatus Sadiyah binte Katri, daughter of Hajjah Maimunah. Back then, it was uncommon for children to undertake the Hajj as it was often a financially and physically challenging undertaking.</p>
	<p><b>Tortoise-shaped ingot made from tin</b></p> <p><b>c. 15<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries   Malay Peninsula   Collection of National Museum of Singapore</b></p> <p>Chinese accounts of the Malay Peninsula (now Malaysia) report that tin ingots were used as currency from the 15<sup>th</sup> century. This practice of producing animal-shaped currencies lasted into the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the sultanates of Perak and Selangor. Many of the ingots which survived till today include those in the forms of crocodiles, elephants, tortoises,</p>



	<p>grasshoppers and cockerels.</p> <p>These animal ingots were prized for their uniqueness and rarity. In current times, they are also regarded as mediums through which communities from the Malay peninsula could understand and research into how their design and use could be traced back to the natural world. Besides their main use as currency, it has also been suggested that these ingots were also used as talismans, weights and/or even toys.</p>
	<p><b><i>Sulalatus Salatin</i> (translated to “The Genealogy of Kings”) or better known as <i>Sejarah Melayu</i> (the Malay Annals)</b></p> <p><b>1896   Singapore   Collection of the National Museum of Singapore</b></p> <p>Believed to be written between the 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> century, the <i>Malay Annals</i> was written in the classical form of a <i>hikayat</i> (chronicles). This corpus details not only stories of Malay royalty, but also of the communities that lived under these rulers.</p> <p>Till today, the <i>Malay Annals</i> remains to be one of the most popular go-to corpora for stories, research into past livelihoods and even adages that reflect customs and traditions of past Malay life.</p>
	<p><b>Circumcision cloths of Minangkabau origin</b></p> <p><b>Late 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries   Indonesia   Collection of Asian Civilisations Museum</b></p> <p>For most Malay/Muslim communities, the traditional <i>berkhatan</i> or <i>sunat</i> (circumcision) ceremony also marks the rite-of-passage for boys as they mature into men. In more elaborate ceremonies in the <i>Nusantara</i>, the boy is prepared for the ceremony in the manner of a bridegroom the day before the actual circumcision. During the ceremony, the boy’s modesty will be covered with a piece of cloth specially made for the occasion.</p>



### **Congkak set with bird motif**

**Early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century | East Coast Malaysia |  
On loan from Rossman Ithnain**

*Congkak* was once a popular game played throughout the Malay Archipelago. Until the 1970s, it was quite common to see a *papan* (wooden) *congkak* in Malay households. The game is believed to have originated from the Middle East and spread throughout the *Nusantara* through merchants who visited trading ports in the region, most notably, the ports along the Straits of Malacca.

## **Gallery 2 – Me-reka**








### **Rice pounding set**

**Undated | Java | Collection of Asian Civilisations  
Museum**

Rice served with assorted dishes (*lauk*) are a staple in the cuisine of various Malay ethnic groups. From the Minangkabau community to the Banjar community, rice is a common feature in their respective cuisines. For example, the *Javanese* would have the *nasi ambeng* (a rice sharing platter with rice in the middle surrounded with other dishes served on a round tray) while the Minangkabau community have the *nasi padang* which refers to rice with an assortment of dishes.

Besides the staple use of rice in *Nusantara's* gastronomic heritage, the growing, harvesting and preparation of rice are often activities that promote family and community bonding. The cooking paraphernalia on display shed light on the common rice-related experiences within the various *Nusantara* communities. The rice pounding set reminds us of Javanese agrarian communities involved in rice production, as well as the traditional ways in which rice would be harvested while the water receptacle would be a common sight during local weddings where eating with hands would be the norm.

	<p><b>Gold and silk <i>songket</i> textile</b></p> <p><b>Late 19<sup>th</sup> century   East Coast Malay Peninsula   Collection of Malay Heritage Centre</b></p> <p>This <i>songket</i> comes from the Malays of the north-east coast of the Malay Peninsula. Its brocade work is fine; it comprises red silk woven with gold-wrapped thread and coloured silk thread. The central panel (<i>badan</i>) is filled with flower motifs: star motifs (<i>bunga sinar matahari beralih</i>), a small eight petal flower (<i>bunga kermunting cina</i> - the Chinese rose myrtle), and floral chains (<i>corak teluk berantai</i>). The panels at either end are decorated with <i>kepala punca</i> motifs, the triangular bamboo shoot motif (<i>pucuk rebung kayohan</i>) and a tulip-shaped motif (<i>bunga tiga dara</i>), and what is probably the <i>lawi ayam</i> (chicken feather) motif.</p> <p>Due to its cost and intricacies, the <i>songket</i> is reserved for special occasions, often worn during the post-Ramadan festivities of Hari Raya, which included calling on family members and in formal occasions, local dignitaries.</p>
	<p><b><i>Horse Attacked by Lion</i></b></p> <p><b>Raden Saleh   1842   Indonesia   Oil on board   On loan from JT Lim</b></p> <p>Raden Saleh was a 19<sup>th</sup> century Javanese painter (c.1811-1880) who spent more than two decades in Europe as a 'child of the state' of the Dutch government. He produced many of his iconic paintings during the years 1830s to 1850s featuring battle scenes of animals and horsemen, gaining fans amongst the elite European circles.</p> <p>This painting, as well as much of his works, sheds light on an era when much of Java was living under colonial rule. Despite painting this work while living in Europe, Raden Saleh remained very much inspired by the landscapes of his homeland. In fact, Raden Saleh's love for his homeland and Javanese culture did not diminish his affinity for Western life</p>

	<p>and practices, which resulted in art critics interpreting his 'battle scene' paintings as symbolising his own personal struggles between two worlds.</p>
	<p><b>Adana manual printer</b></p> <p><b>c. 1960s   United Kingdom   Collection of National Museum of Singapore</b></p> <p>Before the 1950s, small food and beverage businesses used basic marketing methods, and often relied on word-of-mouth to attract new customers. However, as the publishing industry in Singapore grew, businesses found that handing out promotional leaflets or advertising in newspapers helped increase customer footfall.</p> <p>The arrival of the <i>Adana</i> manual printer was considered a watershed as it enabled even small businesses to design and print their own promotional materials. Moreover, this printer could be placed on any table surface and was more portable than most printing presses.</p>
 	<p><b>Rebab and bow (string instrument)</b></p> <p><b>Late 19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> centuries   Terengganu and Kelantan   Collection of Asian Civilisations Museum</b></p> <p>Musical instruments play a central role in most traditional performances in the <i>Nusantara</i>. They serve as musical accompaniment to different types of performances – from the spiritual <i>main puteri</i> (a shamanistic performance) to the more popular shadow puppetry.</p> <p>Besides the sounds they produce, the craftsmanship of these instruments speaks of skills and traditions passed down through master craftsmen, while the materials used to create such instruments (for example, the use of animal skins and other organic materials) reveal a symbiotic relationship with the natural world.</p>

## ANNEX B

### **Malay CultureFest 2022**

Date: 28 January to 13 February 2022

Time: Various Timings

Organised by the Malay Heritage Centre (MHC), the annual *Malay CultureFest* celebrates the evolution of Malay culture in Singapore, and its intricate links to the *Nusantara* through specific themes that touch on richness, diversity and cross-cultural influences. This year, in conjunction with MHC's special exhibition *Cerita, Malay CultureFest 2022* will present an exciting assortment of performances, workshops and forums held both onsite and online.

#### **Festival Highlights: Onsite programmes**

##### **In Celebration of Sri Warisan at Taman Warisan**

Date: 29 January 2022

Time: 8PM

Venue: MHC Auditorium

Admission: \$20

This performance with the concept of a 'Docu-edutainment' will showcase Sri Warisan's journey at MHC since 2002, which was the beginning of the pre-opening of the Centre. In 2005, Sri Warisan was the 'Resident Performing Arts Group' and performed at least three cultural shows daily. Mdm Som Said was one of the three Resident Cultural Icons, together with Mr Iskandar Jalil and the late Mr Sarkasi Said.

Get a glimpse of the curated events, festivals, talks and commissioned work for MHC. Sri Warisan will be performing historical songs such as "*Citra Bangsa in Kampong Gelam*" which showcases the history of immigrants who came to Kampong Gelam, as well as "*Lestari seni di Taman Warisan*", a grandure royal dance and also a song used to welcome guests and tourists who came to MHC with the use of *Cembul Emas* (translation) props, which is coincidentally the element used in MHC's logo. Both songs were composed by local Composer Mr Zubir Abdullah.

Visit <https://mcf22-incelebrationofsriwarisanattamanwarisan.peatix.com/> to book your tickets now!

##### **[FULLY REGISTERED] [Cerita Kita Series] The Other Malays: Locating the Orang Pulau and Orang Laut in Singapore's Narratives**

Date: 5 February 2022

Time: 2PM

Venue: MHC Auditorium

Admission: \$5 refundable deposit

Singapore's history is filled with stories of the Orang Laut and people who inhabit the smaller islands nearby. However, there is still much that we do not know about these communities. In



this forum, MHC has identified several individuals to share on the lived experiences of the Orang Laut and Orang Pulau, their histories, traditions and unique beliefs. Joining the panel will be Dr Hamzah Muzaini whose research includes the southern islands and its people. Reserve your seat now at <https://mcf2022-theothermalays.peatix.com/>.

Sentosa di Kubah Hayat featuring Ramli Sarip

Date: 5 February 2022

Time: 8PM

Venue: MHC Auditorium

Admission: \$50

Enjoy some of the greatest hits and recent music from local rock icon Ramli Sarip. Book your tickets now at <https://mcf2022-sentosadikubahhayat.peatix.com/>.

**[FULLY REGISTERED]** Dang Anum by Anggerik Temasek Bangsawan

Date: 12 February 2022

Time: 3PM & 8PM

Venue: MHC Auditorium

Admission: \$20

Immerse yourself in the *Bangsawan* performance of the tragic story of a young woman who became the favourite consort of the Sultan, and the perils that followed which shocked a nation. Register at <https://mcf2022-danganum.peatix.com/>.

Bangsawan Workshop

Date: 13 February 2022

Time: 3PM

Venue: MHC Auditorium

Admission: \$5 refundable deposit

*Bangsawan* is a type of traditional Malay opera or theatre accompanied by music and dance. Participants can practice their flair for acting and learn various character archetypes found in the traditional Malay *Bangsawan* at this immersive workshop experience. Register at <https://mcf2022-bangsawanworkshop.peatix.com/>.

**Festival Highlights: Online programmes**

Lintas Nusantara x Silat: Balada Nusantara

Date: 30 January 2022 (Showcase #1), 4 February 2022 (Showcase #2)

Time: 8PM

Venue: MHC Facebook Live (<https://www.facebook.com/malayheritage>)

Admission: Free

The 10th installation of *Lintas Nusantara* is a love letter to *silat* – an ancient martial art form practiced across the *Nusantara*. Explore *silat's* influence on dance in the region through magnetic performances.



Showcase #1

1. *Pajaga Makkunrai, Malkassar*: Performed by Ida El Bahra Arts Management feat. Daeng Serang Dakko and Guru Tenri
2. *Galuik Kumango, Jakarta*: Performed by Benny Krisnawardi and Sigma Dance Company

Showcase #2

1. *Dauliti, Singapore*: Performed by The Kaizen and Seri Setia Pulau Singa
2. *Silat and the Bawean Community*: Featuring Persatuan Bawean Singapura and Sanggar Seni Dharma Pasuruan