

MEDIA RELEASE

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NEWLY REVAMPED MALAY HERITAGE CENTRE UNVEILS REFRESHED GALLERIES AND A REOPENING FESTIVAL



Left: façade of the Malay Heritage Centre; Right: one of the centre's refreshed six permanent galleries

Singapore, 22 April 2026 — The revamped Malay Heritage Centre (MHC) will reopen to the public on 25 April 2026, featuring refreshed galleries, commissioned artworks and a nine-day Reopening Festival anchored on a new narrative, ***Dari Rantau Ke Rumah (From the Region to Home)***. The narrative explores the evolution of Malay identities in Singapore, and how the Singaporean Malay community's links to both a multicultural society and the broader Malay world have shaped its identity.

2 The reopening marks a significant milestone in MHC's ongoing commitment to celebrating the richness and diversity of the Malay world. It invites visitors from all walks of life to step into the revamped Centre to reflect on the cultural inheritance of the Malay community here, and the future of the Malay identity in Singapore. MHC's relaunch follows recent announcements on the expansion of MHC's role and capabilities, to strengthen its role as a cultural anchor within Kampong Gelam and enhance its position as a centre for Malay heritage in Singapore. These include enhancing placemaking efforts in the precinct, of which the Reopening Festival is the first step towards doing so.

3 Dr Norshahril Saat, Chairman of the Malay Heritage Foundation, said, "MHC has continually strived to present Malay heritage in ways that feel relevant and resonant to contemporary audiences. This revamp is the culmination of years of hard work, enriched by invaluable community input and contributions, to ensure that the stories told honour the depth, diversity and dynamic nature of Malay cultural heritage. With MHC's expanded role and mandate, the Centre is well-placed to serve as a nexus for the Malay community in Singapore, and a cultural

anchor for the Kampong Gelam precinct. As we embark on this new chapter, we look forward to welcoming one and all to visit, partner and collaborate with us.”

An immersive journey through six thematic spaces

4 Visitors can explore the evolution of Malay communities through MHC’s six permanent galleries. It will feature 279 artefacts, with a quarter loaned by the community. Through a journey across time from 19th-century Singapore to imagining the possibilities of the future, visitors are encouraged to contemplate on what it means to be Malay in Singapore and how this identity continues to evolve with time. The six gallery themes are:

- **Gallery 1: “We are Playing Relatives!”** explores the theme of kinship formation in Singapore and Riau-Lingga;
- **Gallery 2: An Era of Changing Kings** examines the complex face of the Malay peninsula and Singapore in the early 20th century;
- **Gallery 3: Journeying to Settling** explores the cultural rite of passage of migration;
- **Gallery 4: City of Dreams: Making A Mark** explores the changing visibility and roles of Malay women in the 1950s and 1960s;
- **Gallery 5: Our Living Heritage** explores how Malay traditions, memories, and values are passed down, adapted, and sustained within families and in everyday life; and
- **Gallery 6: We+ Heritage** encourages visitors to consider the future of the Malay identity in Singapore.

5 The refreshed galleries highlight the rich tapestry of Malay heritage with broadened representation across Malay sub-ethnic groups through material culture, language and writing systems. Visitors can encounter the diversity of Malay heritage, including the Javanese, Baweanese, Bugis, Banjar, Minangkabau, and Orang Pulau communities.

6 The refreshed experience also introduces a wider cast of *Perintis* (pioneers), both familiar and newly featured. Their contributions and legacies are showcased with new perspectives, shedding light on lesser-known facets of their lives. Zubir Said’s mentorship of younger musicians after composing *Majulah Singapura*, and Yusof Ishak’s role as co-founder of *Utusan Melayu* in 1939—a key platform for socio-political discourse that trained figures like journalists and editors before his presidency—these stories offer a more nuanced look and understanding of how individuals have shaped the community and nation.

7 The refreshed content also places a stronger spotlight on Malay women, recognising their contributions to education, literature, and the arts, as well as the challenges they faced in forging their own paths. Visitors can learn more about figures such as the first known woman pilgrim broker Hajah Maimunah, the first Malay woman radio announcer Zahrah Za’ba, and cultural

innovators like Nona Asiah and Siti Radhiah, whose stories offer inspiring insights into resilience, creativity, and leadership. Please see [Annex A](#) for more information on the refreshed galleries and highlights.



Corridor of Cultural Memories, featuring carved wooden congkak set

8 Threading through the galleries are the Corridors of Cultural Memories, which offer intimate glimpses into the Malay community’s living heritage: everyday life, traditions, and shared histories. For the first time, newly commissioned works by local Malay artists are woven into the spaces, adding contemporary interpretations that extend the narrative, and present heritage through a fresh lens. More information on the artworks can be found [here](#).

MHC Reopening Festival: *Pesta Pecah Panggung — Transcending Boundaries*

9 To commemorate this milestone, MHC will be presenting a Reopening Festival titled ***Pesta Pecah Panggung — Transcending Boundaries***. From 25 April to 3 May 2026, the festival will bring to life the narratives of the galleries by highlighting the richness of Malay heritage in Singapore and its deep connections across the region.

10 The festival will be split into two thematic weekends that parallel MHC’s new narrative, *From the Region to Home*. The first, themed “*Exploring the Malay World*”, will showcase the diversity and shared heritage of the Malay world, while the second is themed “*A Home for Our Community*” and unpacks what it means to be Malay in Singapore. With over 50 programmes lined up by more than 60 partners, visitors can look forward to performances, installations, workshops, and community programmes running from day to night. More details on the programmes can be found [here](#), and interested members of the public can register for programmes [here](#). Highlights include:



- ***Pecah Panggung Parade*** that features over 300 community partners who will present themed pushcarts and cultural performances for all to get into the festive spirit;
- ***Kota Impian: Modern Women*** which spotlights Singapore's pioneering Malay women in a musical-theatre production, produced and performed by an all-female ensemble;
- ***Wajah & Bayang: Nusantara Arts Showcase***, a special showcase curated by the MHC team, will bring together a diverse mix of music genres and art forms across the region, featuring performers from Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore; and
- ***Santai Sampai Pagi: A Night Out at MHC***, the Centre's first-ever overnight event reminiscent of a slumber party. Visitors can look forward to film screenings, dance workshops, karaoke, a pyjama contest, and more exciting activities.

11 Hafiz Shariff, General Manager, MHC, said, "We have thoughtfully curated our Reopening Festival programming to reflect the renewed narrative of our galleries, creating pathways for visitors to deepen their understanding of Singapore's Malay heritage and its connections to the broader Malay world. As a cultural institution within the Kampong Gelam precinct, MHC is committed to active placemaking – working in close partnership with community stakeholders to further enliven the precinct. The Reopening Festival represents the first major initiative in this vision, with programming that will transcend MHC's walls and into the precinct: from a "big bang" parade with more than 300 participants at Bussorah Street, to community artworks and performances at Sultan Gate Park, thematic guided tours of the Kampong Gelam precinct, and more."

Visiting the Malay Heritage Centre – Free Admission to Galleries

12 In conjunction with MHC's reopening, all visitors (including tourists) can enjoy free admission to the galleries from 25 April to 28 June 2026¹. After this period, Singaporeans and Permanent Residents can continue to enjoy free admission to MHC's galleries year-round. Members of the public can find more information on MHC's galleries and festival programming at www.malayheritage.gov.sg, and stay updated through MHC's Facebook and Instagram (@malayheritage).

— **END** —

For media enquiries, please contact:

¹ Excluding Mondays when Malay Heritage Centre is closed. As with all national museums, MHC remains as free admission for all Singaporeans and PRs.

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Gabrielle Lee
Tate Anzur
Mobile: 9040 4813
Email: gabrielle.lee@tateanzur.com

Lee Say Hua
Tate Anzur
Mobile: 9668 4605
Email: sayhua.lee@tateanzur.com



About the Malay Heritage Centre

The Malay Heritage Centre (MHC) is a heritage and cultural institution dedicated to presenting the history, culture, and contributions of the Malay community in Singapore. Its permanent exhibition traces the evolution of the Malay community through centuries of movement, trade, and cultural exchange across the Malay Archipelago till today. Through its varied programming, the Centre serves as a vibrant platform for community engagement and cultural showcases within the Kampong Gelam precinct. It is housed in a National Monument — the former 19th-century Istana Kampong Gelam, once the royal seat of Malay royalty in Singapore.

The Malay Heritage Centre is managed by the National Heritage Board in partnership with the Malay Heritage Foundation.

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. 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, safeguards and promotes intangible cultural heritage, 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 for more information.



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ANNEX A

Information on MHC’s refreshed spaces

Gallery / Space	Details
<p>Preview Gallery: Introduction to the Malay world and Singapore’s Place in It</p>	<p>The Preview Gallery serves as the starting point for visitors to embark on their journey. It challenges the notion of Malay identity as one that is static and introduces it as a concept unbound by rigid geographical or racial structures. It sets the stage for guests to reflect on how they can honour their heritage while shaping their legacy for the future.</p> <p>This fluidity is demonstrated via a short film that traces the historical contours of the Malay world, from its Maritime Roots and regional trade networks (13th-14th century) to the imposition of Colonial Boundaries (15th-17th century) and the subsequent Postcolonial Contestations and Global Malayness (18th-20th century). The video also features a specially commissioned soundtrack by Riduan Zalani, co-founder of Nadi Singapura and Young Artist Award 2015 recipient.</p> <p>Visitors will encounter the first commissioned artwork <i>Earthly Echoes</i> by Fazleen Karlan (NEO_ARTEFACTS), which reimagines the layered histories of the site. The sculptural installation acts as a conduit between the past and present, integrating modern found materials with ceramic shards excavated from the Istana Kampong Gelam compound, translating archaeological data into forms that highlight the continuous influence of cultural interaction.</p>



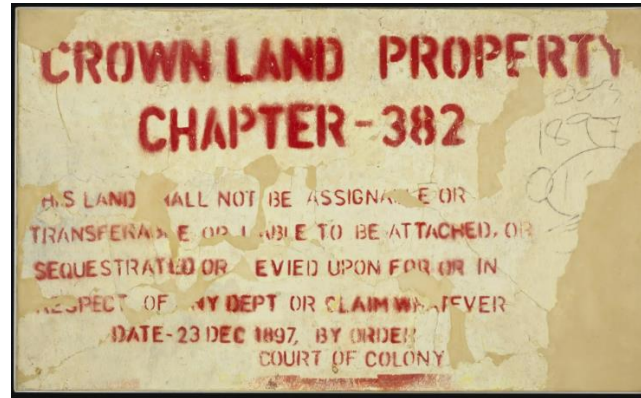
Earthy Echoes by Fazleen Karlan (NEO_ARTEFACTS)

Corridor of Cultural Memories:
Istana Kampong Gelam

This dedicated space traces the physical history of Istana Kampong Gelam, from its origins as Sultan Hussein Shah's 1819 residence to its establishment as the Malay Heritage Centre in 2005. The gallery explores themes of royal authority and the transition under colonial rule. The narrative covers key moments, including the replacement of the original wooden palace with the current brick building in 1890 and the eventual declaration of the Istana as Crown property in 1897.

Key artefacts showcase the lifestyle and colonial impact on the royal household. Highlights include:

- Istana Kampong Gelam Stencilled Sign marking the estate as Crown property




Stencilled signage from Istana Kampong Gelam
c. 1990

Collection of Malay Heritage Centre

- Six Dish with sponge-printed birds, shards and fragments from plates of various European origins, with some pieces traced to Japanese and Malay sources, which served as a marker of high status, and illustrate the assimilation of trans-regional trades into local Malay traditions



Dish with sponge painted birds

	<p>17th to 19th century Courtesy of Singapore Archaeological Collection Excavated by Professor John Miksic</p>
<p>Gallery 1: "We are Playing Relatives!"</p>	<p>Gallery 1 explores the theme of kinship formation in Singapore and Riau-Lingga, focusing on the close, yet often tense, relationships between Malay and Bugis nobles of the Johor-Riau Sultanate in the 18th and 19th centuries. The gallery is segmented to illustrate how kinship was formed through marriage ("Marrying Kin"), common languages ("Speaking Kin"), and shared material culture and practices ("Dressing Kin"). The narratives also highlight how British and Dutch colonialism began to disrupt the traditional power structures in the region.</p> <p>A major focus is on the political roles of women as "kingmakers" who were responsible for holding kinship ties together. Examples include Engku Puteri Hamidah, who safeguarded the Sultanate's regalia, and Tengku Embong Fatimah, who was initially selected to be the first Sultanah of Riau but was forced to step aside due to gender opposition.</p> <p>Key artefacts include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Nekara</i> (kettledrum), which was part of the sacred nobat royal ensemble symbolising sovereignty and divine legitimacy 

Bronze *nekara*

c. 19th century

Collection of Malay Heritage Centre

- Set of two *pending* (belt buckles) with semi-precious stones, worn as a status symbol and amulet



Set of two gold *pending* with semi-precious stones

19th to 20th century

Gift of Malay Heritage Foundation

Collection of Malay Heritage Centre

Gallery 2: An Era of Changing Kings

This gallery examines the complex face of the Malay peninsula and Singapore in the early 20th century, characterised by contesting ambitions among Malay royalty, the British colonial government, and a new Malay urban middle class. The central themes explore the reinvention of Malay rulers to maintain relevance and the British colonial government's efforts to shape and "market" popular imageries of Malaya, particularly through international events like the 1924 British Empire Exhibition.

Artefacts emphasise the intersection of power, trade, and colonial influence. The following highlight artefacts are shown for the first time:

- The Gold Cane Top of Maharaja Sir Abu Bakar of Johor, which demonstrates how Malay nobles leveraged relationships with the British to advance their ambitions, earning Abu Bakar the Knight Grand Cross of the Order of St Michael and St George



Gold Cane Top belonging to Maharaja Sir Abu Bakar of Johor (GCMG)
1870s

Loan, courtesy of Dr Lye Wai Choon

- *Kain Tenun* in Purple and Red and the “Britain’s Past and Present Beckon you to Wembley” poster, which is used to illustrate how the 1924 British Empire Exhibition held in Wembley reduced colonised subjects to objects of spectacle

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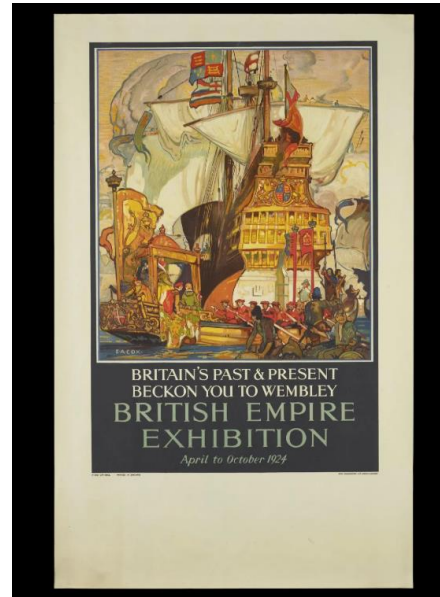
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Purple striped *tenun* cloth with stylised blossom motifs

20th century

Collection of Malay Heritage Centre



Britain's Past and Present Beckon You to Wembley British Empire Exhibition poster

Elijah Albert Cox
1924

Collection of Malay Heritage Centre

Corridor of Cultural Memories:
Scripts of the Archipelago

This corridor explores the rich linguistic diversity of the Malay world, showcasing how various languages and writing systems have adapted over time while remaining rooted in community traditions. The themes centre on the preservation and evolution of language and script. Visitors are introduced to three distinct scripts: *Jawi*, *Lontara*, and *Rejang*. The space is primarily an interactive one, inviting visitors to engage personally with these traditions by learning to write their own names in one of the three scripts. This activity encourages visitors to compare these traditional writing systems with Romanised Malay and offers them a tangible keepsake of the varied script traditions of the Malay Archipelago.

Corridor of Cultural Memories:
Crafting with Nature

This space focuses on Malay artisans who derived inspiration from the natural world, including flora, fauna, and mythical beings, to create carvings, tools, and textiles. These motifs were stylised to conform to both Malay and Islamic art traditions. The themes explore how communities utilise their local environment to express their identity and how cultural motifs, such as those found in *batik*, spread through regional trade.

The space invites visitors to engage with this craft through *Batik* stamping, experimenting with rhythmic patterns like *ceplok* (grids) and motifs like *kawung* (stylised palm fruit). Visitors can also try a digital version of the traditional board game, *Congkak*.

An artefact highlight is the carved wooden *congkak* set. Modelled after a mythical bird, this artefact showcases how Malay artisans were influenced by Hindu-Buddhist and Muslim kingdoms from across the Siamese border.



***Burung Petala Wati* carved wooden *congkak* set**

1970s

Collection of Malay Heritage Centre

Corridor of Cultural Memories:

Inspired by the Malay proverb, "*Patah Tumbuh, Hilang Berganti*," meaning "What is broken



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<p><i>Patah Tumbuh, Hilang Berganti</i></p>	<p>regrows, what is lost is replaced.", this space highlights the enduring nature of heritage, resilience, and community renewal in the face of change. The central theme is intergenerational exchange, focusing on how cultural knowledge and practices are passed down from elders to younger generations. This is achieved through video projections of practitioners demonstrating their cultural knowledge across various crafts, such as dance, <i>kompang</i>, and theatre. The content reflects both the heritage and the reinvention of these traditions, inviting visitors to reflect on the dynamic process of cultural evolution within the community.</p>
<p>Gallery 3: From Journeying to Settling</p>	<p>This gallery explores the cultural rite of passage of migration, which was linked not just to economics, but also to personal growth, honour, and community responsibility. The gallery examines how Singapore's position as a cosmopolitan hub catalysed the movement of people, goods, and ideas across Southeast Asia. The gallery's sections cover the impact of Transportation Networks, Religious <i>Merantau</i> (<i>Hajj</i> as a key transit hub), Intellectual <i>Merantau</i> (rise of publishing and reform debates), and Economic <i>Merantau</i> (Kampong Gelam as a commerce hub).</p> <p>Highlights of this gallery include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilgrim pass belonging to Hajjah Maimunah, who was the first licensed female <i>sheikh haji</i> (pilgrim broker) in Singapore. The pass underscores women's expanding roles in religious life



Jawi typewriter belonging to Syed Ahmad Semait

c. 1970s

Gift of Pustaka Nasional
Collection of Malay Heritage Centre

- Diamond weighing tools that belonged to Haji Ahmad Jamal, who was a *Banjar* merchant operating in Kampong Intan (modern-day Baghdad Street), catering to wealthy Arab and Peranakan clients





	<p style="text-align: center;">Gem and diamond weighing tools belonging to Haji Ahmad Jamal 20th century Loan, courtesy of the family of Haji Ahmad Jamal bin Haji Mohd Hassan</p>
<p>Gallery 4: City of Dreams: Making A Mark</p>	<p>Focusing on the 1950s to 1960s, this gallery explores the changing visibility and roles of Malay women, particularly within the entertainment industry, during the nation-building years. The theme is the rise of the modern Malay woman as an aspirational figure in film and media, who shaped a new collective <i>Bangsa</i> (Nation) despite facing gender-based societal disapproval.</p> <p>The gallery features several notable women: journalist Saleha Mohd Shah @ Haliza Mohd Som, editor of the popular women's lifestyle magazine <i>Fesyen</i>, and multi-talented actresses/directors like Siput Sarawak and Normadiah.</p> <p>Artefacts illustrate the diverse and aspirational creative efforts to forge a modern collective world through popular culture. Highlights include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Black <i>songket</i> shift dress with evening jacket, showcasing traditional Malay fabric adapted to Western silhouettes



**Black songket shift dress with evening jacket, designed by Mulchands Singapore
1960s**

Loan, courtesy of Kebaya Societé

- *Cincin buah kana batu Ceylon* (Gold ring with marquise cut Ceylon sapphire), a coveted jewellery design during its time
- “*Majulah Singapura* – for schools” autographed music manuscript by Zubir Said, which positions his work in creating the national anthem alongside his efforts to foster national consciousness through patriotic songs



Majulah Singapura - for schools sheet manuscript

1959

Gift of Puan Sri Datin Dr Rohana Zubir

Collection of Malay Heritage Centre

- Red-and-black kebaya designed by Raja Zai worn by K Fatimah in the film *Ibu Mertuaku* (My Mother-In-Law, 1962). Raja Zai also designed kebaya for other actresses to be worn in films, including Sarimah's *in Labu dan Labi* (1962)



***Kebaya Bunga Hati* worn by K. Fatimah in
the film *Ibu Mertuaku*, designed by Raja Zai
Tukang Jahit
1960s**

Loan, courtesy of K. Fatimah and Kebaya Societe

Gallery 5: Our Living Heritage

This gallery brings the journey "home," exploring how Malay traditions, memories, and values are passed down, adapted, and sustained within families and in everyday life. It focuses on intergenerational transmission through life cycle events, showcasing how the purpose of traditions is preserved even when their material expression changes. The featured sub-sections include rituals surrounding birth (*Lenggang Perut*), the evolution of family structure (Vignettes of Family Life), and the passing down of knowledge (Heritage Begins at Home and Marriage Mementos).

Highlight artefacts are:

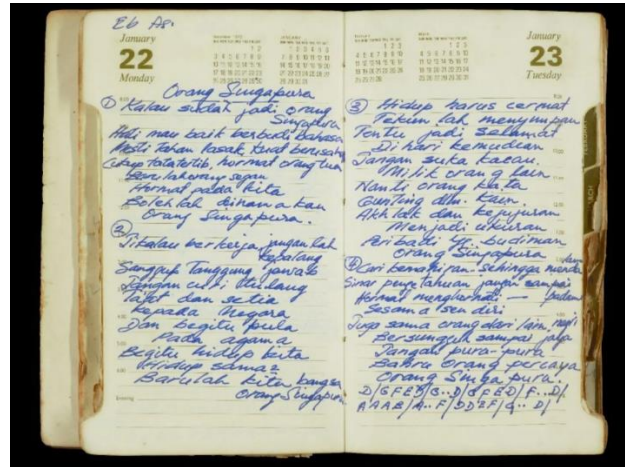
- Series of Family Photographs from the Family of Haji Sulaiman, which document seven decades of change—from Hari Raya gatherings at the family home in Kampong Melayu, Jalan Eunus, to present-day reunions in rented event halls. The family now numbers over 400 members.



Photographs of the family of Haji Sulaiman
1950s–2009

Reproduced with permission from the family of Haji Sulaiman

- Planner with handwritten song lyrics belonging to Nona Asiah, linking her public career with her private family heritage and showcasing the intimate transmission of culture



**Planner with handwritten song lyrics including *Orang Singapura* belonging to Nona Asiah
1973**

Gift of the family of the late Nona Asiah
Collection of Malay Heritage Centre

- One 'crown dollars' (*Duit Hantaran*), made of one-dollar notes folded into a shape of a crown as Malay Wedding gift (*Hantaran Kahwin*) from groom to the bride showcase the traditional wedding practices that symbolise the groom's promise of devotion



Crown-shaped currency arrangement
c. 1980s
Collection of National Museum of Singapore

Gallery 6: We+ Heritage

As the final, experimental space, the We + Heritage Gallery encourages visitors to engage in speculative imaginaries and consider the future of Malay identities in Singapore. It explicitly asks visitors: "Where next?".

Unlike previous galleries, this space contains no traditional artefacts but instead presents three collaborative elements:

First, a collaboration with the National Library Board: The gallery features 20 personalities, young and old, some of whose profiles can be found in NLB's Prominent Malays of Singapore (PMoS) portal—an online database showcasing remarkable individuals who have shaped Singapore over the past 60 years. Established figures such as Prof Hadijah Rahmat, Nadiputra, Zubir Said, Mohamed Salleh Marican, Halimah Yacob, and Fandi Ahmad are presented alongside younger Singaporeans working across diverse fields. Visitors can access their profiles and more, through touchscreens linked to the PMoS portal.



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	<p>Second, a curated reading corner featuring works by Singapore Malay creatives: Including writers like Diana Rahim and Noridah Kamari, and theatre figures like Joni Jon Jon, who speculate on alternative histories and futures for the community.</p> <p>Third, participatory art installations: Two/Three commissioned artworks invite visitors to engage with themes of inheritance and evolution. <i>Bintang Layar</i>, <i>Bintang Cipta</i> by Mysara Aljaru is a mixed-media installation that asks visitors to imagine cinema if women had equal space to create. <i>Sistem penyulitan masyarakat lusa (sipemalu)</i> (encryption system for society of the future / the shy one) by Bani Haykal is an interactive sound installation exploring alternative tools for cultural preservation in the future.</p> <p>Fyerool Darma rounds off the entire experience by asking visitors to join him and his fellow explorers to chart the parallel universe of Nooantara (a play on <i>Nusantara</i>, a term often used to describe the wider Malay world). through his wall installation <i>kædæluwær\$æk\$§\$æk</i> (The Xenographer's Index).</p>
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