

Celebrating
DIVERSITY
AND
INCLUSION
AMONGST SINGAPORE'S MUSEUMS



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FOREWORD

by Chair, ICOM Singapore & Museum Roundtable

This year's ICOM International Museum Day (IMD) theme of Museums for Equality: Diversity and Inclusion reminds us that arts and culture should be accessible to all, regardless of age, ability or background. It also highlights and reminds us of the important role that museums play in promoting and facilitating greater dialogue, understanding and empathy amongst the different groups in society.

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic where many museums were closed and on-site activities had to be cancelled or postponed, I am heartened that Singapore's museums, facilitated by the ICOM Singapore and Museum Roundtable¹ Secretariat, proceeded to commemorate IMD with a series of meaningful digital stories featuring various inclusive initiatives contributed by our museums.

From dedicated programmes for seniors and adults with disabilities, to telling the stories of gender equality and our nation's multicultural landscape, these digital stories showcased our members' efforts at incorporating and celebrating elements of diversity and inclusion in their programmes and narratives.

On this note, I am emboldened by our members' commitment and ongoing efforts to position or re-position their museums as inclusive spaces for visitors of different backgrounds and needs. I would also like to thank them for their contributions and I am confident that our museums will remain committed towards ensuring that arts, culture and heritage in Singapore continue to be accessible to all.

Finally, I would like to applaud the continued emphasis placed by ICOM on social inclusivity and access to museums. As shown through the stories in this e-booklet, Singapore's museums will continue to play their part in developing and implementing programmes that further ICOM's vision of an inclusive and accessible global museum community.

Chang Hwee Nee
Chairperson, ICOM Singapore & Museum Roundtable

¹ The Museum Roundtable is a community of museums in Singapore established by the National Heritage Board in 1996 to promote a museum going culture amongst Singaporeans through inter-museum collaboration on programming, and mutual capability development and support. The community presently comprises 60 private and public museums, including the majority of ICOM Singapore's institutional members. For more information on the Museum Roundtable, visit www.museums.com.sg.

INTRODUCTION

Museums for Equality: Diversity and Inclusion is this year's ICOM International Museum Day theme. The theme is a rallying point for museums worldwide; to celebrate the diversity of perspectives that make up their communities, while encouraging museums to continue with their efforts at identifying and overcoming bias in their exhibitions and in the stories they tell.

Yet, what does "diversity and inclusion" mean for Singapore's museum sector? In Singapore, our museums have introduced a variety of exhibitions and programmes for people with diverse needs and backgrounds.

Many have ensured that the collections they showcase represent those whose voices are less heard in society. Through different means, our museums have championed the importance of inclusive spaces as part of Singapore's ongoing journey to create cultural spaces that are inclusive and welcoming to all.

This e-booklet chronicles some of these efforts by museums in Singapore, which were featured on the ICOM Singapore Secretariat's "I Love Museum" Facebook page in May 2020 to commemorate International Museum Day.

The content of this e-booklet is particularly meaningful as it was developed during a period when all our museums were closed due to COVID-19. It bears testament to the resilience of museums in Singapore and illustrates how they have pivoted to digitisation to continue with their public outreach efforts.

Together, this e-booklet serves as a good reminder to audiences of Singapore's rich and diverse museum landscape, and highlights how important it is for the museum sector to persevere and continue with their efforts to promote inclusivity, intercultural understanding and tolerance, even amidst challenging times.

Engaging THE ELDERLY

Museums in Singapore have always been attentive when it comes to developing and presenting age-friendly initiatives. This section shines the spotlight on the dedication of our museums to engage the elderly and ensure that the initiatives they offer are senior-friendly.





A *Reminiscence Walk* taking place in the Kampong Gelam precinct. Image courtesy of National Heritage Board.

National Heritage Board's Heritage Institutions

The National Heritage Board's (NHB) heritage institutions, comprising the Indian Heritage Centre, Malay Heritage Centre, and Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall, function as Silver Hubs under NHB's Our SG Heritage Plan. The Silver Hubs initiative seeks to develop and offer programmes that cater to the interests and needs of seniors in Singapore. NHB's heritage institutions collaborated with SAGE Counselling Centre to co-develop a series of *Reminiscence Walks* in the historical precincts. With senior ambassadors as guides, these experiential walks strive to evoke memories, encourage conversations and reduce social isolation of seniors.

National Museum of Singapore

The National Museum of Singapore has developed many programmes to engage senior organisations, care partners and seniors. These include engaging seniors with dementia in conversations using its collection centred on Singapore's history and heritage. More recently, programmes have included resources, video tutorials and conversation prompts based on the museum's *Moving Memories* installation; an animation of local artist Yip Yew Chong's seven life-sized murals. Nature lovers can also look forward to the *Fruitful Encounters* activity guide which introduces a selection of fruits featured in the

museum's prized William Farquhar Collection of Natural History Drawings, or create their own masterpieces using the colouring templates of the plants from the collection. Food lovers can also try to create dishes inspired by various eras of Singapore's history, with recipes presented in the museum's video series *Tastes of Our Time*. These resources are available online [here](#).



Colouring with the templates provided by the National Museum of Singapore. Image courtesy of National Museum of Singapore.



A mural featured in *Moving Memories* at the National Museum of Singapore. Image courtesy of Yip Yew Chong.

National Gallery Singapore

While most of us may be conversant in the English language, some seniors in Singapore are more comfortable conversing in their native dialects. With this in mind, National Gallery Singapore rolled out a series of pilot initiatives aimed at reducing linguistic access barriers. One of them is the gallery's *Dialect Tours*, an interactive conversational tour conducted in Chinese dialects (e.g. Hokkien and Cantonese) by their trained docents to engage with Chinese dialect-speaking seniors. Driven by sharing and conversation, these organised tours also aimed to foster inter-generational bonding within the family. Find out more about National Gallery Singapore's community and access programmes [here](#).



A docent engaging participants in a fun activity during the *Dialect Tour*. Image courtesy of National Gallery Singapore.

Science Centre Singapore

Science Centre Singapore's *Dialogue with Time* exhibition is a guided experience facilitated by a group of retirees aged 65 and above. Senior guides lead guests through various exhibits and strike up conversations

about stereotypes and assumptions on old age. They inspire those around them with their optimism and enthusiasm, as well as their passion for their roles in making others embrace and understand ageing.

Senior volunteers enjoying a good follow-up discussion with guests at the *Dialogue with Time* exhibition.



The centre also celebrates the International Day for Older Persons (IDOP) on 1 October to highlight the important contributions of Singapore's elderly to society and raises awareness of the opportunities and challenges of ageing in today's world. In 2019, the centre's senior guides worked with youths from Science Explainers Academy to facilitate a series of curated activities that encouraged inter-generational bonding and promoted awareness of the challenges faced by Singapore's ageing population.



A senior guide and youth from the Science Explainers Academy participating in the *Eye Can See* activity where guests learn about vision, long- and short-sightedness. Images courtesy of Science Centre Singapore.



Seniors visiting the Kwong Wai Shiu Hospital Heritage Gallery as part of *Reminiscence Walks* at Balestier. Image courtesy of Kwong Wai Shiu Hospital Heritage Gallery.

Kwong Wai Shiu Hospital Heritage Gallery

The Kwong Wai Shiu Hospital (KWSH) Heritage Gallery has made careful considerations for the seniors, especially those who are wheelchair users. Pathways are kept wide enough for wheelchair access, while exhibition content is presented in both English and Mandarin to better engage visitors who are more comfortable with the latter. Seniors relive memories when they visit the gallery, with some even sharing that they are "KWSH babies" as they were delivered at its now-defunct maternity ward (operational between 1910 and 1965). KWSH also conducts *Traditional Chinese Medicine* talks for senior visitors in its bid to promote physical and psychological wellness among the elderly.



Seniors from the Alzheimer's Disease Association practising basic photography skills at the Peranakan Museum. Image courtesy of Alzheimer's Disease Association.

The Peranakan Museum

The Peranakan Museum partnered with Alzheimer's Disease Association (ADA) to put up a digital photography exhibition in conjunction with World Alzheimer's Month in September 2018. The project saw eight senior participants and six caregivers taking photographs around the museum for a few sessions. They also had an opportunity to wear Peranakan attire and have their own portraits taken. This culminated in a series of photographs that were exhibited at the museum's *Amek Gambar* special exhibition. The collaboration offered the seniors a platform to connect with their past through reminiscence while they explored the cultural traditions and arts of the Peranakan community. It also increased their creativity and self-esteem as they were taught photography techniques. ADA also conducted a Dementia Care Mapping, which showed an overall improvement in the well-being of participants after the programme.

HDB LIVINGSPACE Gallery

The HDB LIVINGSPACE Gallery chronicles how the Housing & Development Board (HDB) keeps up with Singapore's changing demographics, as well as new social and lifestyle trends, to create homes that meet Singaporeans' needs. The gallery highlights how housing policies and programmes are designed to enable the elderly to age-in-place

comfortably and to enjoy their golden years with peace of mind. It showcases how universal design is adopted throughout the estate and within the flat to ensure that the living environment is accessible to all, while regular improvement programmes equip older flats with elderly-friendly features such as grab bars and ramps.



HDB LIVINGSPACE Gallery visually engages visitors with their latest housing initiatives and bold planning ideas dedicated to providing quality living environments for Singaporeans. Image courtesy of HDB.

THEME 2

Facilitating Access for PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Museums in Singapore have also designed programmes to facilitate access to arts and heritage for persons with disabilities. The narratives and storylines in the galleries of our museums also remind visitors about the importance of accessibility in different areas of our daily lives.



Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall

A mobile telepresence robot is part of the National Heritage Board's *Be My Robo-Date* programme launched at the Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall. This remote-controlled robot seeks to provide access to the galleries and special exhibitions of the heritage institutions for persons with disabilities who are unable to visit the institutions. With the help of the robot, visitors only require a device with a video camera and microphone, such as a laptop or smartphone, as well as a stable Wi-Fi connection to go on a virtual tour remotely. Each robot will be paired with a tour guide who will answer any questions the visitor may have, thereby creating an immersive and interactive experience. Its zoom function allows the visitor to get a closer look at the collections on display.



A mobile telepresence robot partners with a curator to tour the Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall. Image courtesy of Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall.

Singapore Philatelic Museum

As part of *The Little Prince: Behind the Story* exhibition held from 2018-2019, the Singapore Philatelic Museum displayed *The Little Prince In The Dark Collection*

sculptures by artist Arnaud Nazare-Aga, with the support of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry Youth Foundation. The sculptures, depicting iconic characters and scenes

Visually impaired guide from Ngee Ann Polytechnic's *Dialogue in the Dark* leads blindfolded visitors to explore *The Little Prince in the Dark Collection* sculptures by artist Arnaud Nazare-Aga, at *The Little Prince: Behind the Story* exhibition presented by Singapore Philatelic Museum.



from *The Little Prince* story, are meant to be touched and felt so that those who are sometimes left out of the museum experience, such as the visually impaired, can also “see” and appreciate the artworks.

The museum also partnered with Ngee Ann Polytechnic’s *Dialogue in the Dark* to co-curate a special tour of the touchable sculptures where visitors were blindfolded and led by visually impaired guides.



The Little Prince: Behind the Story exhibition presented by Singapore Philatelic Museum. Images courtesy of Singapore Philatelic Museum.



Participants in an *ACM in Motion* session doing theatre warm-ups. Image courtesy of Asian Civilisations Museum.

Asian Civilisations Museum

The Asian Civilisations Museum’s *ACM in Motion* programme, led by trained access theatre practitioners from Access Path Productions, introduced basic theatre skills to visitors with disabilities and their caregivers. Over a series of movement-based workshops, participants connected their stories with objects on display in the galleries. The stories were then turned into song, poetry, and movement.

Singapore Mobility Gallery

The Singapore Mobility Gallery shows how Singapore's public transport system has to be inclusive and accessible to all in order to meet the needs of our diverse population. It highlights the inclusive features within our public transport network, including a mock-up of a signalised pedestrian crossing fitted with *Green Man+*. With more than 1,000 signalised pedestrian crossings fitted with *Green Man+*, senior citizens and Persons with Disabilities

(PWD) can expect up to 13 seconds more time by tapping their CEPAS-compliant senior citizen concession card or PWD concession card. Other inclusive features found in our public transport system include visual indicators (e.g. electronic information systems) and flashing alarms which serve to inform hearing-impaired commuters of the arrival of their bus or train, as well as special bell-push buttons on buses for wheelchair users.

Visitors can learn more about the *Green Man+* and other access initiatives of the public transport system at the Singapore Mobility Gallery. Image courtesy of Singapore Mobility Gallery.



Singapore Sports Museum

The Singapore Sports Museum showcases the importance of inclusive athleticism and how sports must encompass and enable those with physical disabilities. The museum highlights the increasing number of people with disabilities in sport and physical recreation, with organised sports for athletes with disabilities divided into three main categories: sports for the deaf, sports for persons with physical disabilities and sports for persons with intellectual disabilities. The museum also showcases the contributions and achievements of outstanding Singapore athletes in the local and international arenas, regardless of their disabilities, in its Hall of Fame.

As part of its gallery storyline, the Singapore Sports Museum highlights the importance of inclusive athleticism. Image courtesy of Singapore Sports Museum.

Singapore Art Museum

The *SAM Touch Collection* is an initiative by the Singapore Art Museum (SAM). It is a portable and interactive collection of artwork adaptations based on the National Collection for the visually-impaired community, seniors and persons with disabilities. SAM is currently working on expanding the *SAM Touch Collection* and the accompanying resources such as audio description recordings and reproductions of the finer details of selected artworks. The museum will also be recruiting and training volunteers as part of this initiative. Click **here** to learn more about SAM's access programmes.



The SAM Touch Collection was developed to engage the visually-impaired community, seniors, and persons with disability. Image courtesy of Singapore Art Museum.



THEME 3

Bridging the GENDER GAP

The topics of gender and gender representation are woven into the storylines, exhibitions and programmes of several of Singapore's museums. These representations highlight our museums' efforts to showcase women's progression in society, and to further the discourse on women's empowerment.





Women in Action on display at Yale-NUS College Library in 2018. Image courtesy of Malay Heritage Centre.

Malay Heritage Centre

The Malay Heritage Centre collaborated with various women pioneers and organisations to present a travelling exhibition entitled *Women In Action* which recounts the history of the Malay women's movement in Singapore between the 1930s and the 1970s. This travelling exhibition highlights the struggles and the breakthroughs of pioneering organisations and individuals in the Malay community in their pursuit to secure the rights of women, which are now enjoyed by many in areas such as education, marriage, divorce rights and entertainment. The schedule of the travelling exhibition can be found [here](#).

STPI Creative Workshop & Gallery

In 2017, STPI Creative Workshop & Gallery staged *We Are the World — These Are Our Stories*, the first solo exhibition at the gallery by local pioneer female artist Amanda Heng. The artist worked with the STPI Creative Workshop to produce twelve distinct collaborative pieces that sought

to encompass performative, visual, and interactive elements. Heng's works are noted for their relevance in highlighting social issues, especially vanishing values and disintegration of the social fabric in the face of modernity.

We Are the World — These Are Our Stories. Image courtesy of STPI Creative Workshop & Gallery.





Special lecture by Dr Wee Hong Ling for art students at St. Anthony's Canossian Secondary School. Image courtesy of The Private Museum.

The Private Museum

In celebration of International Women's Day 2018, The Private Museum Singapore presented *In Flux* by New York-based Singaporean artist Dr Wee Hong Ling. The exhibition is the inaugural showcase of blacksmithing works by a Singaporean female artist. As part of the exhibition, Dr Wee reached out to over 20 schools and 10,000 students in Singapore to share her studio practice and the themes presented in the exhibition. As an advocate for the arts, Dr Wee engaged students to inspire and encourage them to pursue their passions. Besides giving students the opportunity to understand her art-making processes in interactive small-group discussion sessions, Dr Wee also shared the motivations and visions behind her projects.

Singapore Botanic Gardens Heritage Museum & CDL Green Gallery

The Singapore Botanic Gardens staged *Marianne North: An Extraordinary Life* at the CDL Green Gallery in 2017. The exhibition featured over 80 paintings by Marianne North (1830-1890) made in Java and Singapore in the 1880s. It also cast a light onto her adventures around the world

and shared about how she had broken free of gender stereotypes that were prevalent during her time. Driven by her desire to improve the existing knowledge of natural history, she remained unmarried and travelled extensively to document plants and flowers through her paintings.



Marianne North: An Extraordinary Life was a showcase of Marianne North's detailed paintings made in Java and Singapore in the 1880s. Image courtesy of Singapore Botanic Gardens.

MINT Museum of Toys

The MINT Museum of Toys' *Journey of Rediscovery Tour* is a specially curated tour which explores current socio-cultural issues. Placing emphasis on the topic of gender equality, the tour, *An Exploration of Gender Equality Through Toys* explores the origins of a series of handcrafted wooden dolls and its maker, the Door of Hope Mission. Opened by five Protestant women in 1901 during an era where females faced discrimination in education, the mission promoted inclusion by providing education as well as imparting practical skills to women. These included sewing, embroidery and knitting which they applied whilst crafting clothes for wooden dolls. One of the dolls made by the women of the Door of Hope Mission is a Manchu Lady Doll crafted in the 1920s, dressed in traditional headdress and silk robes commonly worn by the Manchurians in China during the Qing Dynasty.



A Manchu Lady Doll made by women from the Door of Hope Mission. Collection of the MINT Museum of Toys.

A postcard published by Edward Evans, Book Room featuring a photograph of five young Chinese girls from the Door of Hope Mission in Shanghai, year 1910. Collection of the MINT Museum of Toys.



Girls - Door of Hope.

THEME 4

Celebrating MULTICULTURALISM

One of the most unique traits of Singapore lies in our vibrant multicultural and multi-ethnic society. Many museums in Singapore have been active advocates in celebrating and telling the stories of Singapore's diverse communities.



Community Specific Institutions

Community specific institutions such as the Eurasian Heritage Gallery, The Intan, NUS Baba House, Chinatown Heritage Centre, Indian Heritage Centre, Malay Heritage Centre, Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall, Chinese Heritage Centre, etc. highlight the rich history and heritage of their respective communities and showcase how these

communities contributed to Singapore's progress. In addition, the National Heritage Board and its institutions regularly present exhibitions and programmes which highlight the commonalities shared across the different ethnic communities and how understanding such commonalities can contribute to a shared national identity and racial harmony.

The Intan is home to an array of antiques that tell the story of Peranakan history and heritage. Image courtesy of The Intan.



The Gan Heritage Centre, established by the Gan Clan Singapore, traces 2,500 years of the clan's illustrious history and their roots in Singapore. Image courtesy of Gan Clan Singapore.



The Eurasian Heritage Gallery showcases the history, culture and contributions of Singapore's Eurasian community. Image courtesy of Eurasian Heritage Gallery.



Indian Heritage Centre

The Indian Heritage Centre looks at dress as a marker of identity when tracing the diverse identities of Singapore's South Asian and Indian communities. Part of the centre's collection, the *talapa* is a traditional headgear made from batik fabric and worn by men of the Chetti Melaka community. The Chetti Melaka are descendants of Indian traders who settled in the region as early as the 14th and 15th centuries and married local women of Chinese or Malay origin. Their language, dress, cuisine and lifestyle are a unique combination of Indian, Malay and Chinese influences, embodying the spirit of multiculturalism, diversity and inclusivity.



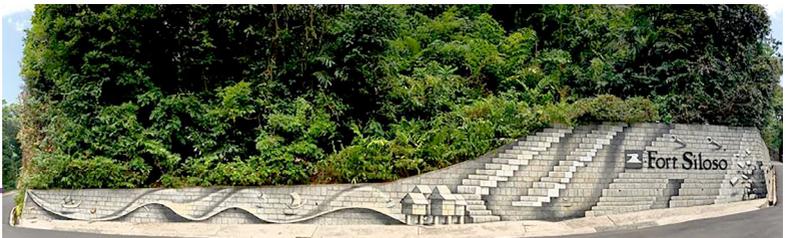
Up close with a *talapa*, a traditional batik headgear worn by the men of the Chetti Melaka community. Collection of Indian Heritage Centre.

Fort Siloso

Waves of the Straits is a series of interactive paintings produced by local artist Yip Yew Chong. Displayed at Fort Siloso, it provides a visual retelling of the history of the Singapore Straits. Some of these paintings illustrate the historical trading of goods and cultural artefacts, while others feature native plants alongside those which were brought to the island. Altogether, the paintings highlight the cultural exchanges that took place among the early settlers in Singapore, which allowed for multiculturalism to take root and flourish over centuries of cultivation.



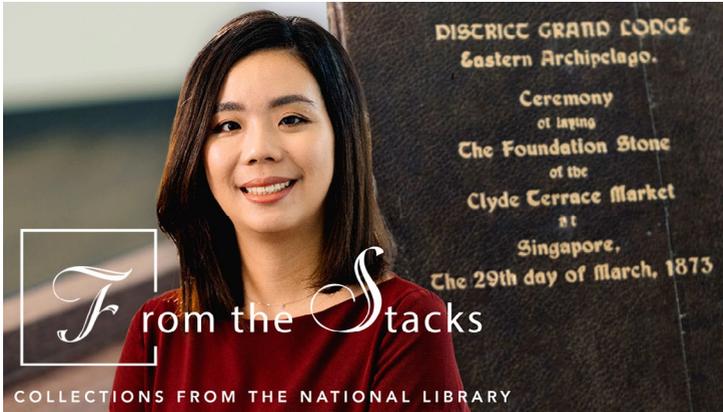
Waves of the Straits at Fort Siloso. Images courtesy of Sentosa Development Corporation.



National Library, Singapore

From the Stacks is a video-series introducing rare materials from the National Library, Singapore's collection. For example, in the video featuring the publication *Ceremony of Laying the Foundation Stone of the Clyde Terrace Market*, one can discover the history

behind one of Singapore's earliest markets, the Clyde Terrace Market, with Associate Librarian Zoe Yeo. The publication highlights the role of traditional markets, and how they enable people of all races, languages and religions to mingle while shopping for goods.



Ceremony of Laying the Foundation Stone of the Clyde Terrace Market. Image courtesy of National Library, Singapore.



Watch this video [here](#).
Catch up on past episodes [here](#).

CONCLUDING NOTE

The examples featured in this e-booklet are but some instances of how museums in Singapore have actively sought to promote diversity and inclusion in various forms, and through different means.

Through innovation, collaboration and partnerships, museums in Singapore and around the world have it within themselves to start crucial conversations on diversity and inclusion and become institutional exemplars for the larger museum community.

Looking forward, ICOM Singapore will continue to encourage our museums to create meaningful experiences for peoples of diverse backgrounds and needs, and to share the dynamic stories of different communities in Singapore.

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