

**Embargoed until 16 September 2019, 11:00am**

**National Museum of Singapore presents  
*An Old New World: From the East Indies to  
the Founding of Singapore, 1600s–1819***

*Exhibition tells lesser-known stories of Singapore's history 200 years before the arrival of Sir Stamford Raffles, as part of the Singapore Bicentennial commemoration.*



**Singapore, 16 September 2019** – From 21 September 2019 to 29 March 2020, the National Museum of Singapore will present *An Old New World: From the East Indies to the Founding of Singapore, 1600s–1819*, an exhibition that uncovers fascinating stories about Singapore, two centuries before the arrival of Sir Stamford Raffles.

*An Old New World* explores the colonial interests and the local perspective of events that took place in the 200 years leading up to the establishment of the British East India Company trading settlement in Singapore, in 1819. The story begins in the East Indies in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, where trade and culture flourished. During that period, the East Indies referred to the area that corresponds roughly to the territories covered by Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore today. The European entry into the region, however, was only part of a longer history of Singapore and the surrounding region, and the events that took place 400 years ago continue to have an impact on the region today.

The European perspective of the East Indies was a “New World” ripe for discovering and harvesting, while the locals saw this as an “Old World” that had already existed and thrived long before the arrival of the Europeans. The exhibition also aims to inspire visitors to reflect on the region’s legacy and see its relevance today. Singapore’s maritime heritage and its strong position in international trade today were shaped by historical events, its deep

connection with its neighbours Indonesia and Malaysia, as well as its strategic geographical location on the global trading routes.

**Angelita Teo, Director, National Museum of Singapore**, said, “In *An Old New World*, we explore a richer narrative by locating Singapore’s position in the history of the broader region—specifically the two centuries before 1819—highlighting our links to Southeast Asia and the world through fascinating artefacts and accounts. By delving into this lesser-known period of history through new perspectives, the exhibition responds to recent developments in historical scholarship, presenting fresh insights into the region’s past.”

### **Diverse selection of rare artefacts shines a light on previously untold stories**

*An Old New World* offers an immersive learning experience that will enable visitors to gain a richer understanding of Singapore’s founding as part of a larger narrative. The exhibition will feature over 220 artefacts, including 75 loans from institutional and private collections. This includes precious personal collections from the families of Sir Stamford Raffles and William Farquhar, treasures from top international museums like the National Maritime Museum and the Rijksmuseum, and highlights from our National Collection.

**Daniel Tham, Curatorial Lead, National Museum of Singapore**, said, “Singapore has never existed in isolation, and its establishment in 1819 as an East India Company trading settlement cannot be fully appreciated without considering its longer history and broader regional context. The themes presented in *An Old New World* unpack this by looking at the impact of the arrival of the English and Dutch East India Companies from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and how their perspective of the East Indies – where Singapore was centrally located – as a “new world” contrasted with the local perspective of the region being an “old world” that had already been thriving economically and culturally.”

Visitors will begin their journey by being transported back in time to experience a multimedia show titled “Meeting of the Worlds”, which dramatises the arrival of the first fleet of the English and Dutch East India Companies in Aceh in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The show emphasises how Aceh was already thriving economically and culturally, prior to the arrival of the Europeans.

The exhibition then continues with six zones:

- **Zone 1: Mapping our World** – Globes, maps and charts are not simply geographical documents telling us where places can be found in the world. They are products of their time, reflecting how those who commissioned and produced them viewed and understood the world and what they deemed to be important. By the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the East Indies increasingly became the subject and focus of maps. This coincided with the European commercial interests in the region, and showed how such interests drove efforts to navigate, survey and document the seas that made up this part of the world. While never credited, the knowledge of the locals who knew the seas intimately and navigated them effortlessly, such as the Orang Laut, was often consulted. With their presence in the East Indies far predating the Europeans’, the Orang Laut played a significant part in the history of the region.



*Katib Celebi's Map of Sumatra and Singapore, 1732*  
*Published by Ibrahim Muteferrika*

This map of Sumatra and the southern part of the Malay Peninsula was part of *Kitab Cihannuma* (Book of the View of the World) by the Ottoman scholar Katib Celebi (1609–1657). It was published in 1732 by Ibrahim Muteferrika, a court steward who established the first officially sanctioned Ottoman Turkish printing press in Constantinople.

The vagueness with which Singapore is identified in this map at the southern portion of the Malay Peninsula suggests the inconsistencies at that time in pinpointing Singapore's exact geographical scope. This was in line with late 16<sup>th</sup>- and 17<sup>th</sup>-century European maps, which were likely consulted in the production of this map. In many other maps of this period and later, "Singapore" is used to refer to what is known today as the Straits of Singapore.



*Pair of terrestrial and celestial globes, 1800/1799*  
*J & W Cary*

Globes are a literal and symbolic representation of how we view the world. This pair of 21-inch globes was the largest size produced in 1800 by J & W Cary, the map publisher and dominant globe maker of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The terrestrial globe exhibits the tracks and discoveries made by Captain James Cook and Captain George Vancouver, while the celestial globe marks the positions of the constellations above. Together, they reflect the understanding of the world at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and illustrate the strong links between cartography, navigation and exploration.

- **Zone 2: Setting Sail** – explores the networking of shipping connections which linked ports and facilitated the exchange of goods between Asia and Europe. It also shows how shipping was conducted on long-distance voyages.



Laurie & Whittle's *The Oriental Pilot; or East India Directory*, 1799



East India Company chart case, c1830

Published by Laurie & Whittle in 1799, the *East India Directory* was a practical guide for navigators to make their way to the East Indies aboard their Royal Navy ships or East Indiamen. It contains 45 numbered engraved charts on 46 map sheets, related to the journey from England to Asia, and was stored in leather cases similar to the East India Company chart case. The page on display in the exhibition shows a 1794 chart of Asia, spanning the Coromandel Coast and Ceylon to the West and Papua New Guinea on the East. The directory can be likened to the modern-day Global Positioning System (GPS).

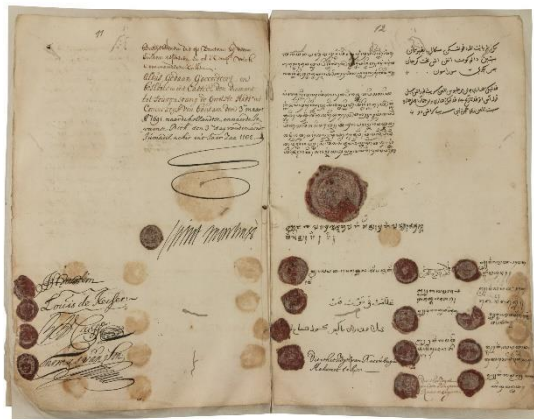
- **Zone 3: Spices and Tea for the Market** – traces the existing trade networks in the region. This includes thriving port cities like Aceh in Sumatra and Banten in Java which saw the Portuguese entering the scene and quickly becoming the dominant European power in the region, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, however, saw the entry of the English and Dutch East India Companies that soon displaced the Portuguese. These events shaped the trade, politics and life in the East Indies.



*Chest with nine porcelain bottles, c1680–1700  
On loan from the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam*

This chest with nine porcelain bottles is an example of the type of gifts that would have been commissioned by the Dutch East India Company (VOC), and presented to Asian elites to maintain good relations and facilitate trade.

While the chest was custom made in Batavia by local craftsmen, the porcelain bottles were produced in Japan, where the VOC had a trading presence at Deshima in Nagasaki Harbour. Decorated with floral patterns and stamped on the underside with the VOC logo, the porcelain bottles would be used to store extracts of clove, nutmeg, cinnamon and sandalwood – spices cultivated and traded by the VOC.



*Treaty between the Dutch East India Company and Sultan Abdul Mahasin Zainul Abidin of Banten, 1691*

*On loan from the National Library of Singapore*

This treaty was signed in 1691 between the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and the newly-installed Sultan of Banten. It is written in Dutch with parallel translations in Javanese and Malay in the Jawi script, and includes the agreement to cancel debts owed by the Sultan and his predecessors on condition that the VOC retained a monopoly on pepper in Banten.

Although Banten was the VOC's first port of call in the East Indies, the VOC was in fact less interested in benefiting from trade there. Instead, this treaty advanced their plans to control the spice trade in the region by further excluding other foreign rivals like the English.

- **Zone 4: Natural History** - the European commercial interest in the East Indies was accompanied by a concurrent interest in exploring, discovering, identifying and documenting the natural world. This drive was framed by the Age of Enlightenment in Europe with its pursuit of knowledge and reason, and cemented with the publication



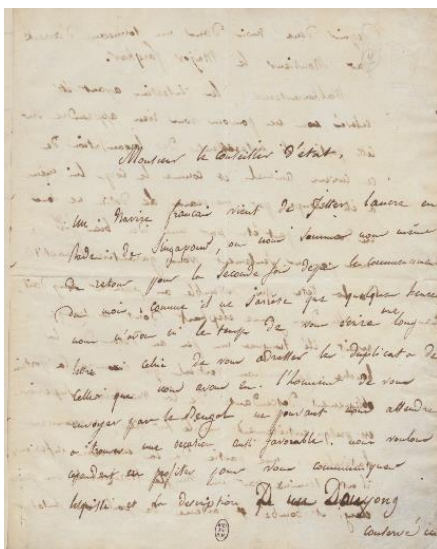
of Carl Linnaeus' *Systema Naturae* in the mid-18th century. Linnaeus, a Swedish naturalist, revolutionised the way in which the natural world was classified and named.

Much of this world was already known to the local inhabitants, who were not just familiar with finding their way through nature but had local knowledge of the practical uses of native flora and fauna. Many European naturalists in this period relied heavily on such local knowledge to navigate through unknown interiors in their expeditions, and to document local names and uses of the often strange species they encountered.



*Drawing of the Spiny Hill Terrapin from Singapore (Heosemys spinosa Gray, 1831), c1819*  
 Deposited by Alfred Duvaucel  
 On loan from the Museum national d'Histoire naturelle, Paris

Of the drawings deposited in the National Museum of Natural History in Paris by Alfred Duvaucel, this is the only drawing clearly documenting its origin in Singapore. The Spiny Hill Terrapin depicted here is a juvenile, as distinguished by the heavily serrated margins of its shell. It can still be found today in parts of Singapore, such as the Bukit Timah and Central Catchment nature reserves.



*Letter from Pierre Diard to a Councillor of State, Singapore, 18 June 1819*

*On loan from the Museum national d'Histoire naturelle, Paris*

This letter was written by Pierre Diard from Singapore to an unidentified member of the French Council of State, and mentions his study of a dugong that had been preserved for two months in an arrack barrel by William Farquhar. Diard describes the dugong, and notes it is more common in the Straits of Singapore than anywhere else in the archipelago. He also mentions that the dugong was regarded by the Malays as a delicacy, and that its flesh is not oily and tastes like beef. He ends off the letter by sending his regards to, among others, his teacher and celebrated naturalist Georges Cuvier.

*Artefacts on loan from Museum national d'Histoire naturelle, Paris, with support from the Embassy of France in Singapore.*

**Zone 5: New Landscapes and Portraits** – The East Indies was a fertile ground, and its peoples often unwitting subjects, for the gaze of the Europeans setting foot in the region. That gaze found its way into the artistic and documentary endeavours of amateur and trained artists alike, from official artists who accompanied voyages to company officials who made amateur sketches of what they saw. What were produced, while valuable today as visual records of an era before the advent of photography, were in fact depictions and sometimes fabrications shaped by that European gaze. The places and peoples of the East Indies were thus often fashioned into landscapes and portraits that reflected the artists' imagination, and along with that, the worldviews and stereotypes they held.

The works featured in this zone illustrate the different means through which images of the East Indies were not only produced, but distributed and consumed.



*View of Singapore Town & Harbour taken from the Government Hill, 1830*

*Possibly after Augustus Earle*

*Published in Memoir of the Life and Public Services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles by Lady Sophia Raffles, 1830*

*Gift of Tang Holdings Pte Ltd*

This panoramic view of Singapore from Government Hill or what is today Fort Canning Hill was possibly based on an original work by Augustus Earle, a travelling artist who passed through Singapore in 1828. As one of the earliest known views of Singapore, this is a valuable document of Singapore's early development as a trading settlement and port as seen from the vantage of Government Hill.

The print features as a fold-out plate in Lady Raffles' *Memoir of the Life and Public Services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles* published in 1830. This particular copy of the book was one of 12 printed for Lady Raffles to present to others, in this case, King Leopold of Belgium.



*Pedro Branco, Straits of Malacca, 1810*  
 Thomas and William Daniell  
 Gift of Peter Lee

*“Pedro Branco ... is descried from a considerable distance, being easily distinguished by the tremendous breakers ever dashing against its base. So violent is the surge at this point, that the boldest navigator might rejoice to leave it behind him; yet, even in tempestuous weather, Malay Proas are often seen near it.”*

- *Thomas and William Daniell in A Picturesque Voyage to India, 1810*

In this image, European merchant ships – even those piloted by the “boldest navigators” – are shown to stay clear of Pedra Branca, an island on the easternmost point of Singapore, while the Malay *perahu* in the foreground bravely and steadily passes in front of it despite the violent waves surging upon the island.

- **Zone 6: Prelude to the Founding** – the final zone of the exhibition argues that the events of 1819 cannot be understood without looking at the broader international events that shaped the history of the region. These include the impact of the Napoleonic Wars in Europe, which resulted in the increasing prominence of individuals like William Farquhar and Thomas Stamford Raffles in the region, and the subsequent events leading to 1819.





*Lloyd's Patriotic Fund presentation sword, 1804*  
*Richard Teed of Lancaster Court*

This sword was presented to Robert Torin, captain of the British East India Company merchant ship *Coutts*. Torin's ship was one of the 16 British East Indiamen under the command of Commodore Nathaniel Dance, which defeated a French naval fleet in the Battle of Pulau Aur. Each captain was rewarded with a sword adorned with the patriotic British figures of Britannia and Hope, and various mythological symbols. These were presented by the Lloyd's Patriotic Fund, which provided financial support for those wounded in battle and their families, and rewarded those with "successful exertions of value or merit".



*Presentation cup to William Farquhar with accompanying travelling chest, 1823*  
*Philip Rundell of Rundell, Bridge & Rundell*  
*On loan from Private Collection*

This silver cup was presented to William Farquhar by the European and Armenian inhabitants of Singapore upon his departure in 1823. The list of names inscribed onto the cup gives a rich picture of the numerous merchants who settled and thrived in Singapore's early years, many of whom followed Farquhar in moving to Singapore from Malacca.

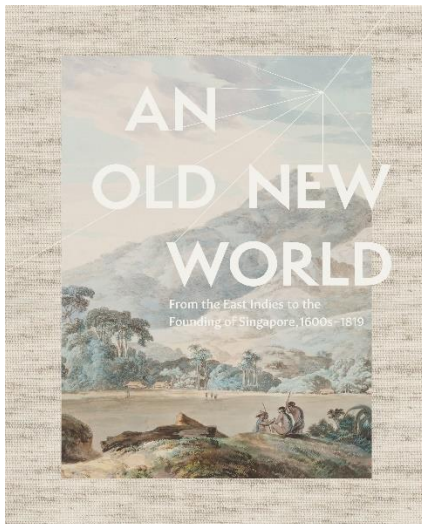


*Keris presented to Thomas Stamford Raffles by the Raja of Buleleng, early 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Lent from the Royal Collection by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II*

This ceremonial *keris* was presented to Raffles, while he was Lieutenant-Governor of Java from 1811 to 1816, by the Raja of Buleleng in Bali. Raffles had been on friendly terms with the Raja, who was supportive of the British. This *keris* was part of a collection of 30 tons' worth of "Eastern curiosities and treasures" in 200 packages that Raffles brought with him when he returned to England in 1816. It was among several weapons he presented as gifts to the Prince Regent. In Raffles' *The History of Java*, this exact *keris* is illustrated as an example of a Balinese *keris*.

### **International conference and exhibition catalogue delves into critical analyses of Singapore's history leading up to 1819**

In conjunction with the exhibition, an international conference titled "Encounters & Connected Histories: Prelude to 1819" will explore Singapore's founding in 1819 within the broader context of the transformational interactions between the British and Dutch overseas trading companies and local communities in the two centuries prior. The conference will take place on 26 to 27 September 2019, and discuss the role of public history in the bicentennial narration and presentation of Singapore's history through exhibitions and in museums.



*An Old New World Exhibition Catalogue*

The accompanying exhibition catalogue will feature in-depth essays on the curatorial intent and approach of the exhibition; the use of Dutch and European sources in informing our understanding of regional politics and dynamics; as well as how contrasting European with indigenous resources in the exhibition enriches our view of Singapore's history. It will also include expanded artefact captions and offer a broader perspective of the two centuries prior to the founding of Singapore in the context of regional and global events.

### **Lively and interactive activities for multi-generational families, young audiences and enthusiasts**

Extending the visitors' experience beyond its galleries, the National Museum will also be presenting public programmes such as storytelling sessions and craft workshops in conjunction with the exhibition's opening weekend on 21 and 22 September 2019. Visitors can also look forward to special accompanying programmes catered to various audiences including children, teenagers, multi-generational families and senior citizens throughout the duration of the exhibition, such as a thematic marketplace inspired by the Banten Market of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, to be held in conjunction with the National Museum's 132<sup>nd</sup> Anniversary.

*An Old New World: From the East Indies to the Founding of Singapore, 1600s–1819* will be held from 21 September 2019 to 29 March 2020 at the museum's Exhibition Galleries, Basement Level. Admission is free for Singaporeans and Singapore Permanent Residents.

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Kindly refer to the media factsheet for further details on the exhibition and accompanying programmes. For event listings, please see listings write-up attached.

High-resolution images of the exhibition can be downloaded; kindly note that the pictures should be credited to the **National Museum of Singapore**.

#AnOldNewWorld | **FB** national.museum.of.sg | **IG** natmuseum\_sg

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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 a progressive mind. Its galleries adopt cutting-edge and multi-perspective ways of presenting history and culture to redefine conventional museum experience. A cultural and architectural landmark in Singapore, the Museum hosts innovative festivals and events all year round—the dynamic Night Festival, visually arresting art installations, as well as amazing performances and film screenings—in addition to presenting thought-provoking exhibitions involving critically important collections of artefacts. 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 2017, it celebrated its 130th anniversary. For more details, please visit [www.nationalmuseum.sg](http://www.nationalmuseum.sg).