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IMAGINING THE EAST INDIES

Daniel Tham
Curatorial Lead, National Museum of Singapore

The idea of the "East Indies" was a largely European construct, shaped by the European exploration of and commercial interest in Southeast Asia. This gave rise to the charting and imaging of the region and its peoples, with the resulting images of the East Indies disseminated and popularised through print. This talk explores some of the artwork currently on display in the special exhibition *An Old New World: From the East Indies to the Founding of Singapore, 1600s–1819*, and demonstrates how these images reveal, more than anything, the European imagination of the East Indies.

TIME (MIN)	
0:00 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	Thank you so much Vidya. What Vidya didn't mention was her own involvement and how much we worked together on many of these acquisitions as well. Poring through potential collections for the museum and what we have worked together has been, really, through the year, so I'd really like to thank Vidya as well, for all her contributions and how we've worked together through all this. And the things that you get to see today will be just a small part of that but, as Vidya mentioned, those of you who have visited the exhibition, *An Old New World*, that's just next door to us, in the basement, you might find some of these images and some of these artefacts a bit more familiar. But I hope, whether you've been to the exhibition or not, these would be of some interest to you. And first up, I'd like to thank everyone for making the time this evening. It wasn't something that we noted at the start but I realized there were quite a few different offerings tonight and different programmes for people to go to. So thank you for making this your choice and I thought I'll just head straight into it as well. As you can see from the title, *Imagining the East Indies*, what is the East Indies? What was the East Indies? In the exhibition itself, that was an exhibition that was put together in commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the establishment of a British East India Company trading settlement in Singapore in 1819. And what we sought to do with that exhibition was to look at the bigger story leading up to that, to that point of 1819 and, in doing so, we decided to cast the net a little bit wider to not just look at Singapore on its own, as the

	island state that we are so familiar with and as we know today, but really to consider its position in that larger region. And what do you call that larger region? It went by very many names but one name that seems to recur is this idea of the “East Indies” and today I'll bring you through the construction of the East Indies. That's something that was never quite solidified, in a way, but it was very much shaped by commercial interests and by certain European imaginations of the exotic, of the Far East. So a lot of the things that we will see today have to do with that imagination and hence the title that we have. So I'm gonna take us through a few things. I'm going to start by looking at the mapping of the East Indies, the way in which the region was mapped and how that reflects, like I mentioned to you, some of the commercial and political interests of the people producing these maps; how revealing that is and maps, not just as geographical documents on their own, but as texts that you can read, as visual texts that are rich with symbols and things for us to decode. So we’ll start with maps. We will then proceed to look at travel literature and, in particular, illustrated travel literature and how that played a big part in this imagining of the East Indies. We will go on to look at this idea of the picturesque; the kind of artistic vocabulary, language and idiom that framed the way people consumed and produced artwork around the East Indies and how the East Indies was then framed within that, yes? Oh, okay. How that was… no worries, I'll just wave back to you anyway. Hello. How the East Indies was framed within that pictorial language. And, lastly, I will extend that discussion to Singapore and how some early representations of Singapore also carried on that legacy but changed things in a slightly different way.
5:02 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	So let's start off with the mapping of the East Indies. You have here, one of the very early attempts at mapping the region. It's by Abraham Ortelius, who was a Flemish cartographer and, as you can see from the cartouche over here, this is a map of East India, so to speak, and for this map, it’s significant because it's one of the earliest framings of the East Indies as featured in Ortelius’ *Atlas*, his “theatre of the world” and you can see how the East Indies, so to speak, fits within that. It's a highly decorative map, as was quite typical of the day. You have pictures of sea monsters, for example, over here. And lots of people have different ideas on why the sea monsters were there. Were they just purely decorative?
6:09 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	Did they signal a kind of mystery? Are these areas that the map maker has no clue about what resides there and therefore you plonk a sea monster there? Perhaps a combination of these things, but sea monsters seem to feature a lot and I think it tells us about how these were really, apart from geographic and cartographic materials, they were viewed as works of art as well and they were decorative.
6:48 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	And as we move on to, well, that map, I should mention as well, it was first published in 1570 and it was reprinted over quite a few editions. It makes it very hard to date many of these maps, but it was printed over a significant period from 1570 to about 1612 and usually map makers tried to make amendments and all. Ortelius just published this as it was over that time period. But if we move closer to the turn of the 17th century, we have two maps that are currently on display at the exhibition and they tell us something as well about

	this framing of the East Indies. The map that you see on the left was by Linschoten and Linschoten was a Dutchman who was under the employment of the Archbishop of Goa and Goa, at that time, was of course under Portuguese rule and the Portuguese were really the ones who had that deep knowledge of navigation of the region. So they were in Goa. They were there since 1510 and soon after, also stamping their position in Malacca, closer to our shores. And this map that you see really shows… it's really that first map to extensively use Portuguese sources and Linschoten had access to sailing records, he had access to first-hand information. He didn't use his own, but he had access to that and, as a result, he was able to publish this map which was actually packaged together with his book called the *Itinerario*, a kind of itinerary of his travels to this part of the world. And one part of the itinerary was actually published slightly earlier in 1595, and was used by the first Dutch voyage to the East Indies. And so, what you see here, then, is a map that not only served as a decorative piece… you still have sea monsters, just to mention… but it was a map that actually had a real impact, in this case, on opening up Asia to the Dutch. And actually, you have this published in 1596. Soon after that, in 1598, you have an English edition being published and that opens the book, his sailing directions and the map to an English-speaking audience as well and it's hard not to see the connection to a few years later in 1600 and 1602 with the establishment of both the English and the Dutch East India Companies, set up primarily to take advantage of the spice trade here. So there you have, Linschoten's map, on the left. It still is a work in progress. I'm not sure if you can recognise much of Asia here, but this was a time when it still wasn't the convention to have north facing north, so you could orientate your map however you wanted just for whatever looked best to you.
10:48 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	But if you can see here, you have China on the left, which leads to the Malay Peninsula. Singapore, of course, being identified there. I'm not sure if I can zoom in any further, but Singapore is listed there, right at the tip of the Malay Peninsula. I remember bringing some visitors through the exhibition and one of my guests was Korean and she asked, “Oh, where is Korea in all of this?” And actually, it is there. I pointed it out to her. Korea is strangely depicted as a round island. And we noticed there were some words and did a closer look… “Island of Thieves”… oh okay, let's move on and not talk too much. But you see how maps like these… you expect them to be objective, scientific documents, but they are filled with all sorts of biases, places where you didn't know very much about or if you didn't really like the people you call them thieves, pirates, however… and who is a pirate? I think that's a debate worth having over many groups of people. Japan, as well, in a very strangely shrimp-shaped coastline as you see over here… What happened from that first Dutch voyage was actually the production of the map that you see on the right. That's a map that was… that came out of one of the crew members of that first Dutch voyage to the East Indies and that's an interesting map as well because that crew member, Willem Lodewijcksz, he published a book about his travels and he intended to have this map included in that book. But if you find a good copy of that book today, the first edition, you would notice that there is a missing page and that missing page is actually of this map. This map was taken out of that book. And what happened was the Dutch merchants found out about his plans to publish it and quickly forbade him from doing so. So you see how maps,

	then, were highly sought-after things, you know? To have a map in your hands really means the ability to not only know how a place looked but perhaps actually to reach it and to get to that place. So that's an interesting story on its own, but one of the main reasons why we have that in the exhibition and why I want to show that to you today is how I think this map that you see on the right, published eventually… nothing stays forbidden for long… it was taken by a German publisher, Theodore de Bry and he managed to get his hands on one of the few original maps that were printed out and he produced his own, which you see over here on the right. One reason why I really wanted to show this is that this, I believe, is the first really large-scale, zoomed-in framing of the East Indies. You have the Malay Peninsula on… let me find my laser pointer… Again, the Malay Peninsula on the top, with Sumatra and Java over here.
14:53 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	And so that gives us a sense, again, of not just what constitutes the East Indies but why such a region was so important. This was the location. This was the gateway to what was known as the Spice Islands and if you are, again, following the story about the Portuguese presence at that time, the Portuguese had already established their presence along the Straits of Malacca which you see here and the Straits of Singapore, which was really quite a thoroughfare. But the first Dutch voyage… they took their cue from Linschoten who suggested, “Hey, why don't you sail through this passageway instead? The Sunda Straits?” And hence, you have actually the ships – the Dutch ships – being depicted here, as you see, passing through not the Straits of Malacca or the Straits of Singapore but rather, the Straits of Sunda, which is the narrow passageway in between Sumatra and Java… and a bit more treacherous but if you can avoid the Portuguese, that makes sense and, as history would have it, soon after the Dutch would establish their administrative capital of the East Indies in Jakarta – well, what is Jakarta today, or what they called Batavia back then in 1619, just over 400 years ago. And that's located, just about – at – the Sunda Straits as well.
16:40 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	I mentioned the establishment of the East India companies and with the companies being established in the 17th century, you see maps being produced for the companies. And, in fact, if you're tracing the kinds of maps that were produced, you'll see an increasing standardisation of the framing of the East Indies of Asia. And here you see two very similar maps by two rival map makers − Blaeu which you see on the left, Blaeu was actually the official hydrographer of the East India Company. And Hondius, who you see on the right… both produced in the 1630s. And quite fun, again, if you were to zoom in and have a look at the cartouches, Blaeu’s map is dedicated, actually, to Laurens Real who was the Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies at that time, whereas Hondius’ map is dedicated to a certain wealthy merchant instead. He didn't quite have that connection to the Companies. But I guess my point here is how you have an increasingly standardised view of the East Indies and, of course, it changes. Just now you had a much more in-depth one. Now you zoom out and… it's never really clear, exactly, what the East Indies was.
18:16 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	Speaking of zooming in, this was definitely one important part of the East Indies. This is a map of the Moluccas or what is Maluku today. And if you always hear the term “Spice Islands”, these are – and were – the Spice Islands

	that we were talking about. And for the English and the Dutch, and especially the Dutch, there was that desire to reach the source. Spices like nutmeg and clove or so were already available in the international market. You could get them from Venice or you could get them from the Middle East, but at extremely high prices. These were spices that were worth their weight in gold. But here, if you were able to reach the source then you were, you know, you could reap the benefits of that trade. So here you have Blaeu's map of the Moluccas. Blaeu actually managed to buy over Hondius' map. So again, all sorts of things taking place, acquisitions…
19:29 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	But what's interesting about this map is how detailed it is. You see here, one of the islands, Bakian, and you have an indication of, in red, the Dutch fortifications that were established on the islands. And you see that repeated again, with the other islands, the locations of the plantations. And apart from that… can't remember if you can still find sea monsters… yes, you can… But apart from sea monsters, the map maker was very interested in depicting shipping as well and you see various examples of European merchant ships, what they called the East Indiamen, and also local vessels. And you can see them engaged in some forms of duelling as well, some battles such as the scene that you see right on top. And, at the same time, you have some attempt at, over here, depicting how the locals looked. I very much doubt they looked like that.
20:48 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	The cartouches, whenever I talk about cartouches, these are the ones that I'm talking about. The cartouches are extremely revealing and here I've just chosen to show you the details of one from one of the other maps of the East Indies by Nicolaes Visscher. And this is a highly decorative cartouche which seeks to illustrate and use all sorts of symbols to depict the East Indies. You have a tropical landscape in the background, palm trees... you can't go wrong with palm trees in showing the East Indies… But you see different groups of Asians and a whole array of different types of trading goods as well that are peppered all across, including animals, too. You have monkeys in front. It's basically a bustling marketplace of goods and that's the view of the East Indies, again, the riches of the Indies, the kinds of goods that you are able to buy. So it's, again, viewed from that lens, a commercial one. So I hope this gives you a taste, I guess, of how the East Indies were mapped and the way such maps tried to depict the region.
22:15 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	And from here, I thought to move on to look at travel literature because travel literature is so interesting from that period. You didn't, of course, have the kind of mobility that we enjoy today and lots of people relied on travel books, travelogues, to get a sense of the world. And with print technology, with engravings, people get an even stronger sense of how places and how people looked. I mentioned Linschoten at the start and his *Itinerario* also contained lots of illustrations, apart from descriptions and shipping instructions and all, and one of the images I find to be extremely interesting because I think it shows you how the production of images is very much influenced – shaped – by the kind of stereotypes held by the artist. And, in this case, you have two pairs of figures – the Malays that you see on the left and the Javanese who you see on the right – and Linschoten goes on to provide a written account comparing the two. He

	seems to be rather fond of the Malays. He regards them as being very good with their speech, very polite, very friendly. And the Javanese, he regards as hard-headed and stubborn and obstinate. So I'm not sure who rubbed him off the wrong way. Actually, in all likelihood, he actually stayed in Goa for most of his time. I don't think… I haven't found any record of him going to Malacca or going to Java. His information is likely to have been second-hand from the various travellers who came to Goa and from stories that he heard from them. Regardless, these stories, however he got his information, these ideas seem to be quite entrenched and they come out in these depictions as well. And this was really a period in which you have this European obsession with ranking civilisations… who's higher in that hierarchy and who is lower… and one indicator, I would say, would be your relative state of dress or undress. The Javanese are wearing relatively less clothes, I would say. Over here they're shown to be slightly more barbaric in not just their dress but as well as their pose. It looks slightly less refined, whereas the Malays are shown to be nicer people, I guess. So again, you would look at this and try to think, what is behind an image like that? To what extent would such depictions or did such depictions reflect reality? And here, you have lots of missing information. We don't have the original sketches, for example, if there were original sketches made by Linschoten or anyone else who actually was there. Even if you had original sketches, how would that have been translated – converted – into print? You would have an engraver who would produce an engraving like this who almost definitely wouldn't have travelled to Asia and he would be, in this case, interpreting the sketch, whether deliberately or not, shaping it for a European audience.
26:29 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	So you have all sorts of things at play in the production of such images. You have Nieuhof, who was actually under the employment of the Dutch East India Company. He joined the Dutch East India Company or the VOC in the middle of the 17th century, he travelled to Batavia and I think they realised he was a rather good draftsman, so he got chosen to go on an embassy mission to China. And he ended up going there and sketched and produced lots of artwork related to that trip to China. That trip was a failure. Don't talk about it anymore. But the book that he produced became a kind of success and it ended up influencing an entire movement into chinoiserie – this whole fascination and obsession with Chinese aesthetics, so to speak. But he also published other books and, in particular, he published a book – well, this was published after he died, actually – but based on his accounts on his voyages and travels to the East Indies. And accompanying those accounts are some depictions of the people groups who lived in Batavia. He was based in Batavia or Jakarta today for much of his time. Actually, his last few years in Batavia weren't so happy. He was accused of under-declaring his records and he ended up being arrested and then he was put under arrest in Batavia for a few years. But that meant he had lots of time spent there and during his time of arrest, especially, I think he had lots of time to draw and to remember his time there. And these are some of the depictions of the various people, the various communities in Batavia. And it's interesting because they are somewhat accurate, I would say. He was very fascinated with mixed groups.

29:04 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	The pair that you see on the right, for example, he calls them the Mardiikers or the Topassers. They were, I guess what you would refer to, quite loosely, as Eurasians today. And he noted how many of them, at least the men, would dress somewhat in the Dutch fashion, but the women would dress a little bit more in native dress.
29:32 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	But the question, again, remains: how accurate such depictions were. Some people have suggested that the depiction of textiles, for example, are quite accurate actually. But yet, at the same time, the way that they are engraved, the clothes seem to flow down a little bit more like Roman togas rather than how your sarongs or your kebayas would look. And the poses, again, that the figures are showing look, again, more European.
30:14 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	This was something fun. What you see on the left is from Nieuhof and that's his depiction of a Javanese couple. A Javanese man and woman. So that's them over here.
30:35 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	And I've been very fascinated with how this image seems to be copied a lot by other printmakers, in the… roughly a century following the publication of this original print on the left. And you see the print on the right, over here, someone seems to have just inverted the print, added some things but… and in the next one over here, given the couple a bit more space, added some fencing around their garden and, in particular, I find that the guy seems to stay the same. And that's sort of when you look at Nieuhof's own written account. He actually writes about Javanese men…
31:35 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	oops, sorry… he writes about the Javanese men being mostly naked except for what they wrap around their waist and their headgear. So that seems to be quite faithfully kept to. He doesn't say anything about the women, interestingly. And, in this case, you see the woman in the prints starting to look more and more European. She looks quite Dutch. By the time you reach this image here, not very recognisable from the original.
32:08 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	I'll share one more. And this is another travel series by François Valentijn. And Valentijn produced this huge series of books, volumes called *The Old and New East Indies*. And Valentijn was a Dutch minister who was posted to Ambon and he spent a lot of his time there and through his experience being there, he published his accounts, lavishly illustrated, and this series of volumes really shaped the European understanding and view of the East Indies for much of the 18th century. These were published between 1724 and 1726. I've been very interested in how he presents himself.
33:13 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	So you see Valentijn's portrait on the left. Let's try and zoom in a little bit to see him. The medallion, as you see here, is held by two women. You have what looks like the Roman goddess Minerva, the goddess of war and of many things. It looks like Athena, as well, [the goddess] of war, of commerce, of wisdom, of art. And you have, over here, on the top left, another woman and that seems to represent Faith personified. I'm not sure how well you can see it from the screen here. She has a very tiny church on her head. I wish I could zoom in a bit more. She has a tiny church on her head and there's an even tinier dove

	sitting atop that church, which is, of course, glowing. So you have this depiction of Valentijn representing his religious faith as a minister, but also his quest for knowledge, for commerce, for the arts, and that's also shown in the various Asians who surround this medallion and there's this seeming pursuit of knowledge.
34:48 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	And this is very interesting as well. If we are to look at the frontispiece of his book… that's what you see on the right, over here… and in one frontispiece, you have dozens of allegories, you have, right at the centre of the picture here, you have a woman and she wears a necklace that says “VOC”, so this is the Dutch East India Company or the VOC personified as a woman. She is seated right at the centre on a throne with a crown. She is a queen and she is right at the centre of this picture. And what you see around her are really representatives of the four continents paying tribute to her. At her feet, on the right, you see America as a woman. She is wearing a headdress and she is presenting some pearls to the VOC. And if you look to the left, you see an Asian pair wearing turbans and they have a variety of – a chest of – jewellery. The man holds a chest of jewellery on his lap and the woman, she is holding an incense burner as well. So these are Asia’s offerings to the VOC. You have Africa being represented on the far left on top and Africa is shown as a man wearing a grass skirt holding elephant tusks, a symbol of the ivory trade. And on top, you will see, again, Minerva, the Roman goddess representing Europe. Europe doesn't really need to pay tribute. She just stands there. You have agriculture being represented by the man holding the plough right next to Minerva. You have the personification of Truth. That's the lady on the right who unveils the curtain revealing the truth and what lies beneath – beyond – the curtain. On the right, you see a scene of the land trade. You have camels and a caravan. And on the left, on the top left, you see a scene of the sea trade of a Dutch East Indiaman out at sea.
37:50 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	And if we were to go a bit lower, over here you have all these cherubs actually being very interested in their studies. They are holding books related to history. The cherub seated in front has his hands on a map. You see another two cherubs behind opening a chest of drawers, taking out some shells. And Valentijn was very interested in shells and tried to document all of that in his book as well. And next to the chest, you see a lady – an angel, perhaps – writing something. And if you zoom in even further, you would see that a Bible verse is being written out by that. And that's actually a verse from the Book of Psalms.
38:59 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	Psalm 107: 23−24, and I'll read that out to you. “Some went down to the sea in ships, doing business on the great waters, they saw the deeds of the Lord, his wondrous works in the deep.” Okay, so there you have, in one frontispiece, everything that Valentijn, I guess, wanted to achieve using his book. I didn't mention that creepy guy on the right. That's most probably a depiction of a Dutch minister and might be Valentijn himself inserted into this image.
39:40 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	And what did he illustrate in his book? You have, on the left, an example, various Dutch fortifications in Ambon. I mentioned he was based in Ambon so he would have been quite familiar with what was there in Ambon. I was very

	struck by this, by how all the various forts were named. They were named Fort Amsterdam, Fort Rotterdam, Fort Middelburg. You see all aspects of Holland being stamped on Ambon. One thing I didn't get to show in the exhibition is the page on the right and that's a page that shows a mermaid, actually. And the mermaid is actually shown alongside other known fish species. You see a sawfish, a catfish, a carp and all, and Valentijn actually claims that a mermaid was caught on the coast of Borneo and, in fact, he also goes on to claim that he saw one himself but, again, who knows whether he did or not? Some people have suggested he might have been referring, instead, to the dugong and the dugong has been referred to as the "lady of the sea", in a way. So was he actually referring to a dugong instead? This idea of the mermaid was actually quite a popular one and how did that creep into his book? How did that end up as part of that imagination of the East Indies? Well, for one, Valentijn was known to have plagiarised quite heavily and taken lots of different sources from everywhere and not really crediting them. Who knows?
41:30 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	This one looks like it was taken from another print, actually, which I've seen before.
41:35 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	In the exhibition, you see images of two slaves and I thought to, at this point, talk about that depiction of slavery. You have, on the left, a slave called Ali and this is a drawing of Claës Fredrik Hornstedt. Hornstedt was a Swedish naturalist who arrived in Java in the 1780s and he did what most of his contemporaries would have done – buy a slave. And he found his slave's name to be long and unpronounceable so he changes his name to Ali, something that he could handle, I guess. And Ali ends up being depicted here, actually helping him prepare his specimens.
42:37 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	So, if you look a little bit closer, Ali is holding a specimen for him. And in the exhibition, we present this drawing as a means of questioning how scientific knowledge in the East Indies relied very much on local knowledge, local expertise, and here in one drawing, you see the relationship between the two. I thought to show this here because both this drawing and the subsequent two that you see on the right really show slaves in the East Indies sort of taken out of their context and then made to do different things. In the case of Ali, we know, from Hornstedt's accounts, that Ali's main job was actually to run in front of his carriage to clear the way. And here, in this case, he is sort of taken out and planted here to become his collecting assistant. For the boy in the centre that you see here, this was a boy from Papua who ended up in the slave trade in Bali. We don't know exactly how he ended up there but in the 1810s, he ended up being purchased by Raffles and Raffles brings him to England. You know the story as well. He has his name changed to Dick and Dick goes to England and becomes a kind of sensation where people there had never seen someone like him before. People come to look at him as a kind of curiosity. And this was really a period of racial ideologies and where physiognomy was used in ranking the races as well. So what you see on the right is actually a print in Raffles' own *History of Java*, of the very same boy, and in that print, you see the boy being depicted in a lot more objectifying position.

44:59 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	And this is actually used to accompany a physical description that was provided for, by Raffles' friend, the surgeon Sir Everard Home, who actually described… who attempts a description of the boy, comparing him to… what he referred to as the African Negro. So that was how the slave was treated, in a way. But I'm interested in how you have two images here of the same boy and he is depicted in quite a different way on the left. And on the left, apart from being subjected to that physical examination by the London surgeon, Dick also gets his portrait done by Thomas Phillips of the Royal Academy and Phillips decides to give this portrait a bit more of a romantic treatment. And so here you have two different portraits of Dick. But what they hold in common, actually, is this idealised, constructed tropical scene of the East Indies again. You can't go wrong, like I mentioned, with planting a couple of palm trees in the background. These were images that were produced entirely in London. So they, in that sense, would have been entirely fabricated landscapes, but to give you a sense of the East Indies and to give you a sense, I guess, of authenticity.
46:38 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	Expeditions and explorations. I will go on to talk about how the East Indies were – or the view of the Indies were – very much shaped through different expeditions, especially scientific ones. The image that you see here was produced as part of Captain James Cook's third and final voyage to the Pacific and this is an image of Krakatoa, one of the very rare views of the island just before – well, not just before, but before – the eruption that obliterated most of the island in 1883. And this was done by John Webber who was the official artist on that voyage. So I've attached a quote here from Cook himself talking about how his job – Webber's job – was to supply the unavoidable imperfections of written accounts by enabling us to preserve and bring home drawings of the most memorable scenes. So you have the imperfections of the written account but with his drawing, something that is more authentic. Again, how authentic would that be? A scene like this would be what we would have considered an extremely picturesque scene.
48:06 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	And I will go on to talk about that in this slide over here. If you've been to the exhibition, you would recognise the scene on the right. And that's a scene that is supposedly of Raffles' riding party crossing the River Chidami at the foot of Gunung Salak in Java. But the origin of that work is actually the sketch that you see on the left. What you see on the left was sketched by Mary Fendall in 1816. Mary Fendall was the daughter of John Fendall who actually came and took over from Raffles as Lieutenant-Governor in Java in 1816. So I'm assuming his daughter had no choice but to follow him, had lots of free time and did a couple of sketches and that's what you have on the left. Curiously, this sketch has a pencil inscription on the reverse saying, "riding party, six to seven miles". On this original sketch on the left, you see no riding party at all. And later on, in Lady Raffles' memoir of the life and public services of Sir Stamford Raffles, the print produced by William Daniell is actually based on this drawing on the left and it resembles, a lot more, the image that you see on the right. And what, essentially, what looks like what happened was that pencil inscription of "riding party" was probably an instruction to Daniell to "Hey, can you add a riding party over here?" He obliges. "And can you beautify this scene? Can you make it picturesque?" And so, you see the mountain, Gunung Salak is – the original is – slightly formless. The mountain on the right is made to look sharper and more

	triumphant, even. You have a much more nicely sculpted foliage on both sides of the river as well. And so this was the job of the engraver of, in this case, William Daniell, in taking an original sketch and turning it into something picturesque. And I want to talk about the picturesque because the picturesque was really this artistic preference, mainly of the British public at that time, that preference for the depiction of nature as it was, as it was just there, unspoilt, rugged, untouched by human intervention. But yet, ironically, that desire for such a picturesque image was made possible only by your artist and your engraver shifting things around to make it look pleasing. So, not so natural, come to think of it.
51:31 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	And that was, I mentioned William Daniell earlier, William Daniell actually travelled together with his uncle, Thomas. I mentioned earlier, official artists who followed these expeditions. In this case, he and his uncle persuaded the East India Company to let them follow on a voyage. And they painted what they saw and they produced an illustrated travel book, in this case, quite aptly called *A Picturesque Voyage to India by the Way of China* and the quote that you see on the right is somewhat of their statement of intent; what they wanted to achieve with this book. And they placed themselves among scientists, naturalists, philosophers who all try to aim at the truth in some way. I'll read the last part. "It remains for the artist to claim his part in these guiltless spoilations and to transport to Europe the picturesque beauties of these favoured regions." So the artist, too, has certain noble missions as part of this larger enlightenment project. And here you have various picturesque scenes.
52:49 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	What's interesting about Daniell's prints is that they are all accompanied with their own commentary. So I'll read some parts of that here. In this case, you have a print showing the *perahu* or what they call the *proas*, the native Malay vessel, and they go on to talk about how the construction of the Malay *proas* cannot but appear strange to the European eye. They go on to say how it is reflective not only of the infancy of navigation but of society at large. And they go on to talk about how society in the East Indies was in a kind of state of stagnation. There is no development; time seems to just keep rolling on without anything happening. So that's their kind of stereotypical but idealised kind of view of the East Indies as never changing and just being stuck in time. You have more pictures of the local vessels.
53:59 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	I will go on and show some further examples of the Malays of Java, of a Malay village. And here, this was the image that we used right at the start. And the Malays of… again, you remember Linschoten comparing his Malays and the Javanese and trying to find the differences… in this case, the Daniells tried to look at the similarities between the Malays and the Javanese and they argue that they are equally prone to idleness and mischief; to sloth and to sensuality, yet are capable of being roused by the hope of profit to occasional efforts of industry and activity. You see that reflected in the print on the left. You have, in the foreground, a few Malays who are lounging, not really involved in any kind of work. It seems that they are involved, perhaps, in cockfighting or some kind of gaming. You have some scene of industry in the background, but it's really to show that, you know, once in a while that happens. But, for the most part, the Malays are just whiling their time away, being idle, and that comes out both in

	the image and in their text. I'll come to the last part and I realise I'm running a little bit out of time.
55:31 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	To the last part of this presentation, I thought to look at how Singapore, then, gets depicted. This is a print that you see on display in the exhibition, a nice panoramic view of Singapore taken from what was then known as Government Hill or what is Fort Canning Hill today. And here it conforms, again, to that template of the picturesque, especially if you look at the trees on the right, they are added there for composition. But this isn't a scene of unspoilt nature. You have developments of the town taking place at the foot of Fort Canning and further in the background, you see a very, very busy shipping scene at the Singapore harbour. So you have a kind of adaptation of that picturesque composition but then used and adapted for depicting Singapore because, on one hand, it is part of the tropics, you want to show that element of where Singapore is but, at the same time, you want to show scenes of development; how the port, in particular, is growing and is busy. Here are some other examples.
57:08 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	In this case, this was a print based on an artwork by Louis Le Breton from the French ship, the *Astrolabe*, that actually stopped by in Singapore for six days in 1839. So again, and I show this to show how that view from atop Government Hill was that favoured vantage for depicting Singapore.
57:35 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	Some of you might be familiar with this painting in our collection, one of our more famous paintings, *A View of Singapore from Mount Wallich* by Percy Carpenter. And this is a view, again, I would argue, a rather picturesque view; one of the largest and widest panoramic views of Singapore done in the 19th century and, again, conforming to that ideal. And here, of course, this is, by this time you are in the middle of the 19th century, Singapore is hugely developed as you can see over here. But, at the same time, lots of greenery that still exists and which the artist Carpenter emphasises. This view from Mount Wallich, or where Tanjong Pagar is today, is again one of these templates that keeps getting repeated over and over again.
58:37 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	In fact, this isn't the first time such a view was done. More than 20 years before that, well, just under 20 years before that, you have a view very similar to that, also from Mount Wallich by another travelling artist, Jacob Janssen… he was a Prussian-born artist who stopped by in Singapore in 1837 and 1838… again, showing that view of Singapore from atop Mount Wallich. So I'm not sure whether Carpenter would have seen such… seen this view before and based his painting on that.
59:21 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	As Vidya mentioned, I do like photography and I just had to squeeze a photograph in here. A view from around the same spot, this time, Mount Erskine, the hill just to the left. And again, you see, in this case, the camera doesn't lie… or does it? Actually, it does. But you see, it's actually a lot harder to compose that picturesque landscape. And in this case, you only see some of the vegetation on the left.

59:56 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	I'll breeze through the rest and this is just a point that shows you how certain images get repeated and reinterpreted over and over again. Apart from views from atop the hills, you have very popular scenes of the mouth of the Singapore River itself. And you see that in the original view on the left, which was actually done as part of yet another French expedition around the world, which landed in Singapore for five days in 1830 in the *La Favorite*. And this became a view that gets copied by different printmakers adding more and more people just to emphasise, even more, how busy Singapore is… adding more and more boats, taking lots of liberties with how the mouth of the Singapore would have been. And I thought to end my talk today. Thank you. I know, I think I exceeded the time a little. But I thought to end since we are talking about imagination, how Singapore gets imagined along the way in various kinds of artwork.
01:01:10 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	The postcard that you see on the left is actually based on a slightly earlier print which was, in turn, based on an artwork by Woodville. And this postcard is actually titled… it was published in the early 20th century around 1911, if I'm not wrong… and it's actually titled *The British Army Entering Singapore After Its Cession in 1824*. What looks to me like a totally imagined scene of… if you zoom in again, that shows what is supposed to be a kind of military entrance into Singapore by the British. That wasn't really the case. You have a carriage here showing a kind of British general or governor alongside a local ruler. Would this be the sultan himself? Who knows? But, again, you have here an entirely fabricated scene of the British arrival in Singapore and that was part of a postcard series that's titled *The Growth of Our Empire Beyond the Seas*. The image that you see on the right, yet another totally fabricated scene of Singapore resembling a lot more… perhaps a port scene in the Middle East rather than in Singapore itself. This is one of the mysteries I have in our collection. I have no idea how this print was produced and what was the context of it. If any one of… I thought to end on this note on what I don't know… if any of you have come across this print before and you know how this came about, I would love to speak to you. It's a huge mystery to me. But I think, on that note, this is really, I would say, far from a comprehensive look at how the East Indies and, in turn, Singapore was framed and, in turn, imagined through artwork. But I hope you get some sense of that, some of the backstories, I guess, to the artwork that you see in the exhibition. And as Vidya mentioned, if you haven't seen the exhibition yet, I hope you do find the time to see it. And with that, I really thank you for your time today. I'll be happy to… do we have time for some questions? I'll be happy to take your questions now. Thank you.
01:04:23 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	And in the meantime, I'll just flash our QR code. Definitely appreciate if you could share your feedback with us and, of course, any questions.
01:04:54 (Speaker: Audience)	Hi, how much documentation of that era is there from Asian sources, either written or drawings? How did that relate to the European accounts?

01:05:05 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	We have written accounts, but much less in terms of visual depictions. So you're asking about Asian accounts and depictions of Europe. We have definitely written accounts and if… sorry? Oh, okay. So you're talking about Asian accounts of Asia itself. Yeah. Again, I would say we have lots of written accounts. Definitely not as much as the Europeans. But you have that. But hardly any of local artist drawings. So that's really one of the limitations that we had to deal with in putting this exhibition together. Especially if you're looking at visual sources and artwork, a large majority of what is available is European. And so, what we decided to do was to actually present that as it is. But then to start poking holes and to question the authenticity, to question the ways in which certain racial, for example, ideologies shaped the way such images were presented.
01:06:46 (Audience)	So now I forgot my question. Yes, what was the… we can understand what the purpose of the mapping was, but what was the primary purposes of the depictions?
01:07:01 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	So, if you're looking at…
01:07:08 (Audience)	Because the maps obviously helped develop trade. Why do you believe these artists started creating these drawings?
01:07:20 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	These were very much decorative maps. And what I don't show in this presentation are how the production of hydrographic charts or sea charts… which tended to be a lot more working documents actually brought on board ships… and those tended to almost have no decoration whatsoever. They were serious documents. Not to say these weren't serious, but these maps were produced with a very different customer base in mind. These were to be consumed in Europe, by people who saw themselves as learned and then these were either kept as atlases or displayed as decorative pieces. So the role of artwork, then, was really to beautify; to make the map actually look attractive. And while they were at it, then, the images and symbols related to the East Indies were highly sought after. They were exotic scenes. They were of curious-looking people and curious-looking things that would not have been familiar in Europe. And these were things that were then sought after as nice to have and to own and to display.
01:09:12 (Audience)	Good evening. I have two questions. First question is, compared to after obtaining the Linschoten map, the Dutch actually uses the Sunda Strait, while the English, James Lancaster, he uses the Malacca Strait. What was the rationale for Lancaster to use the Malacca Strait since he knows that the Portuguese are in Malacca? And my second question is, De Bry's map… it's made but… it's published by Germans. So, to what extent is that… were Germans probably more privately involved in the enterprise of the Dutch East India Company and British East India Company?

01:09:58 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	The first question about the Straits of Malacca versus the Sunda Strait. At that point it was still… what I mentioned to you of avoiding the Portuguese was one consideration. But I think if you're looking at navigation in general, there were advantages to both routes. The use of the Straits of Malacca and the Straits of Singapore, that was a more straightforward route, less treacherous and, in fact, a lot more sheltered as well. So that's viewed to be a safer route. The Straits of Sunda was viewed to be a bit more treacherous. You had to have a good sense of the straits and how to navigate it. There was a lot more open water that you were exposed to and, with that, a lot more risks. But, again, if you're looking at the monsoons, the Sunda Strait was more versatile and it could be used almost through the year. Whereas the Straits of Malacca had a more limited time period for its usage. So there were many different factors at play. But I'm not sure specifically how the decision-making process would have gone. But I'm sure these would have been taken into consideration. De Bry was really a commercial publisher. This map was part of his *Petite Voyages* book and this was really largely a commercial enterprise. The publisher would find sources from all over the world and try to compile them in a single volume that would be appealing, again, to a European clientele. So there is no, in this case, no direct connection to the companies. But more, in this case, I would see this as a publisher – a German publisher – who was extremely enterprising and taking most advantage of what was available out there.
01:12:33 (Audience)	Hi. Thank you for the presentation. You have shown how these different impressions of Asia by Europeans are kind of like… they're deviating further and further from what is actually on the ground. And, probably, they are more a reflection of European beliefs. So my question would be, how seriously do you think the Europeans at that time took these images? Do they use them as… do they think that these really reflected… for those Europeans who never travelled out of Europe, for example, do they take them as… these really reflected what the people were like on the other side of the world? Or they just treated them as pictures on the wall, curiosities, things to embellish their drawing rooms, for example? And also, how do you think this skewed later Europeans' impressions of Asia and Asians as a whole, particularly towards the 19th century when you have the advent of nationalism, ideas about race, and so on and so forth.
01:13:46 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	That's a very good question. I don't think I would be able to have that full understanding of how such literature and how such depictions would have been taken in at that time. But I would say that the pursuit for authenticity is probably similar to how we would pursue it today. People want to know, hey, what is Asia really like? And so, of course, you had all sorts of fantastical accounts before that. But how these travelogues advertised themselves, really, was by emphasising how the authors, for example, were really there. It's not by a second- or third- or fourth-hand account and they've copied it down. These were people who were really there. Linschoten was really in Goa, Nieuhof was really in Batavia, Valentijn was really in Ambon. So that was how it was advertised and, in many cases, the artwork that was produced was also advertised based on how close to the actual events the artist was. So, for example, Nieuhof, when he published his book, *Embassy to the Emperor of China* in 1666, or was it 1665? Around there. This was taken to be the very first accurate depiction of China because this guy really went there. But I don't have

	the image right now. If you look at the frontispiece of that book, it shows who is supposed to be the emperor of China. Doesn't look like him at all. And, for that matter, the Dutch embassy that Nieuhof was a part of never got to meet the emperor. So, again, you still have all these inconsistencies. And, like I mentioned earlier, even if the artist was there, it's not his actual sketches that get reproduced. The sketch is always interpreted by the engraver, who then produces it for the reading public. But I would say, in general, people were still discerning in that sense. As far as they could be, they tried to look out… I mean, they valued accounts that were supposedly first-hand. But even then, as we can see from today, that wasn't always reliable. And we can't always count on them telling the truth. Valentijn claimed everything to be his, but there were huge parts, especially of his natural history sections, that relied on another naturalist, Rumphius, who was supposed to be a good friend of his. I'm not sure how good a friend he was to Rumphius by lifting directly from much of Rumphius' own writings and never ever crediting him. But yeah, so it was prized but, at the same time, I don't think all these writings and publishers were that honest either. To your question about how that shaped subsequent European views of Asians, I would say today we looked a lot at the views of the Malays. And I think you have lots of different ways in which the Malays have been stereotyped, but I would argue that artwork such as that of the Daniells contributed – at least, in part – to reinforcing that stereotype of the myth of the lazy native. You'd have other depictions of Chinese. I don't have that here as well, but many European depictions of the Chinese as slit-eyed, as looking cunning and untrustable, really went quite far into shaping European views of Chinese people as actually being such.
01:18:55 (Audience)	You've shown how the narrative was formed through pictures. And different people copied different things. Would that also lend authenticity? Because the more something is reproduced, the supposed authority of that becomes instilled in people. It's a first-hand account, even though it's seen through a European lens, so they might not understand a lot of what's going on. So they interpret it in such a way that they can place an understanding on it. That's the first step. But as it's reproduced and reproduced and reproduced, it sort of becomes an authority, even when they may not be trained in the area itself. So with that perpetuation, would that not then really shake Europeans' views of people in Southeast Asia or other places?
01:20:13 (Speaker: Mr Daniel Tham)	For better or worse, I think it did. And you see… I guess we look at such works – both the written accounts and the visual ones – with a modern-day, 21st-century lens. And right away, you are able to look at that and critique it, critique its sources, critique its authenticity… and that's exactly the kind of exercise we are doing now. Back then, I guess, the conventions for simple things like citation really weren't there. You could really borrow and reproduce and there was a bit less of an issue, I would say. You didn't quite have those conventions. So I would say that was, in part, a very different paradigm and a very different way in which knowledge was recorded and how knowledge was disseminated. I would say then, that there was still that problem, of a kind of broken telephone. The more time something gets reinterpreted, the higher the chance of corruption, I guess. And that's something that you have to deal with as well. You have books like these which, like the ones that I showed you, which are, in

	a sense, original books. These were by Linschoten or by Nieuhof himself. But there were lots of pirated books as well. And many of these pirated books just took from everywhere. So I suspect this, for example, the one on the right, was from a pirated book that just took an original image. It probably took from this actually, which actually took from this. And the pirated books offered something that the originals didn't, just like a greatest hits compilation today. They took from all sources and they could publish books that offered you pictures and accounts from all over the world, for example. There were many of those and you had very established publishers in that area as well. Van der Aa, for example, did lots of that. And people appreciated the convenience, I guess, of having everything in one book. So yeah. Do you buy your original album or the greatest hits? I would argue there's a difference in the eventual experience. Yeah. Thank you very much once again.

About the Speaker

Daniel Tham is Curatorial Lead at the National Museum of Singapore. He joined the museum as Assistant Curator in 2010, when he curated and set up in the following year the new Goh Seng Choo Gallery featuring the William Farquhar Collection of Natural History Drawings. Specialising in paintings, prints and photography, Daniel has curated special exhibitions at the museum such as *A Changed World: Singapore Art 1950s–1970s*, and was centrally involved in the revamp of the Singapore History Gallery in 2015. He is the lead curator of the museum's Bicentennial exhibition *An Old New World: From the East Indies to the Founding of Singapore, 1600s–1819*.