

The Singapore Example

Christine Khor, Centre For the Arts, National University of Singapore (NUS), Singapore

The origins of Museum, NUS Centre For the Arts began in 1949 and together with the University, it went through several changes to become what it is today. Under the leadership of Christine Khor (Director, NUS Centre For the Arts), the museum is managed by 3 sections, consisting of:

1. Collections & Operations
manages the museum's collections and operational matters, including security.
2. Development & Research
manages the curatorial functions, outreach and education programmes
3. Administration
manages finance, human resources, visitor services, admin & facilities and Baba House project

Since January 2005, the museum has re-positioned itself to focus more on research, collection and outreach to NUS community, local and overseas public, through the use and study of material collection, analysis of Chinese artifacts and multi-disciplinary collaborations with NUS departments and other universities. A recent strategic assessment by the University Senior Management has also geared the museum's role into greater involvement in helping the University become a leading global institution. In view of a necessity to place the museum in the context of the University, the museum has organized the following exhibitions:

EXHIBITIONS (On-going Exhibitions in 2005):

Ways of Seeing Chinese Art (till 2007)

Watch China's 7,000 years of rich culture unfold before your eyes as a spectacular collection of ceramics, jades, bronzes and oracle bones tells the phenomenal story behind one of the world's greatest civilisations. These creations, inspired by natural, social and historical conditions, show the continuity, evolution and variation in Chinese cultural traditions

Dancing Ink & Brush (30 June 2005 to 18 February 2006)

This exhibition which premiered at the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia from June to September 2004, presents a total of fifty-four Chinese calligraphy scrolls and objects in Bronze, Ceramics, Carbon and Stones, dating from 9th - 20th centuries CE from our museum's collection. Chinese art advocates will enjoy the richness and versatility of an expressive medium of art.

The NUS Story: 100 Years of Heritage (6 July 2005 to 31 August 2006)

A visual journey across a century of excellence in tertiary education. Over 400 photographs, archival documents, historical publications, memorabilia and multimedia presentations capture the richness as well as everyday simplicity of campus work and play. For the visitor, this is a nostalgic stroll from NUS' beginnings as a modest college to its current stature as no.18 among the world's best universities, as ranked by Times Higher Education Supplement (2004).

Sculptures by Ng Eng Teng (1 August 2005 to 31 December 2006)

The late Cultural Medallion recipient, sculptor Ng Eng Teng, working in the sixties and seventies, expressed his thoughts and experiences through two and three-dimensional art. His works are based on life and humanity, depicting poverty, loss, justice, love and pain. This is part of a 1,147 piece collection donated to NUS.

A Glimpse Of Our Collection

The museum's collection of over 7,000 art objects includes shining pieces such as:

Material Culture - Oracles bones and Neolithic pots

Chinese material culture is permanent and is possibly the only such display in Southeast Asia (see Picture 1 below)

Picture 1 (Grey Earthenware Pitcher - Late Neolithic (1,500 BCE))



This vessel was used for cooking porridge. It shows that the users had a concept of structure and created the tripod so that it could stand over a small fire.

Ceramics

The 5 major kilns of the Song Dynasty are represented (Qingbai, Longquan, Jizhou, Jun and Ding). There are also Han and Changsha (Tang) wares.

Bronzes

A small but fine collection dating to the Warring States, with special highlight of the Bronze Burial Mask from the Liao period.

Paintings:

The Five Hundred Louhans (see Picture 2 below), which is one of the only two artworks by Chen You, a 17th C artist. This handscroll is 26 metres long. His other work which is small is

being kept at the Nanjing Museum. This piece was rated by veteran Shanghai expert as First Grade on an international scale.

Picture 2 (The Five Hundred Luohans by Chen You)



Some of these works came into the Museum collection even before the National Museum, Singapore started collecting. The star piece is 'Dance' by Singaporean artist Chen Wen Hsi, which is fervently sought after as loan by overseas museums and 'Dancers' by Le Mayeur, which is our most valuable piece.

Southeast Asia (SEA) Ceramics

A good selection of SEA ceramics covering export ware from China, Vietnam, Thailand and Cambodia. If put on display, the exhibition would provide a rather good coverage of SEA ceramics which is not usually assembled in any museum in Southeast Asia, and even less in the rest of the world.

Historical Paintings

The Charles Dyce Collection is a significant collection in Singapore.

Tan Cheng Lock Baba House Museum

The museum will play an important role in conserving the distinctive Peranakan heritage, as well as preserving the memory of a highly respected Peranakan community leader, Tun Dato Sri Tan Cheng Lock. Placed under the charge of the Museum, NUS Centre For the Arts, the Tan Cheng Lock Baba House museum will be restored to its traditional state of grandeur. The purchase and restoration of the shophouse was made possible through a generous \$4 million donation by Agnes Tan, the last surviving child of Tan Cheng Lock.

This museum will enhance the appreciation of restoration and conservation efforts on an authentic Peranakan structure, possibly the last surviving Peranakan house in Singapore. It will exposed visitors to the customs and artifacts of the Peranakan community in a living context. Exhibitions and events held in this museum will showcase fascinating aspects of Peranakan heritage that are best captured in its eclectic mix of signature decorative ornaments, their cuisine, social customs and lifestyle.

New Exhibitions in 2006:

New Exhibitions created in 2006 are part of a natural progression after an audit exercise of 7000 objects in the museum's collection. The museum plans to continue its research into its collection in order to showcase its strength.

A new gallery – NX Gallery is conceptualised as a lifestyle gallery – a platform to host young creative ideas of all genre and introduce complementary and tie-up programmes with faculties in the university. For example an exhibition being planned on “The Keraton of Surakarta” started with an MA thesis work of a student in the Southeast Asian Studies department. This is an opportunity for realizing theoretical research into visual and educational display and allowing students to have a more enriched and rounded educational experience.

New Exhibitions in 2006

SHO – the Japanese Calligraphy (1 Mar to 31 Jun 2006)

Responding to the Divide – David Kwo (1 Nov 2006 to 30 Jun 2007)

Paintings from South & Southeast – Museum's collection (Sept - Dec 2006)

Ceramics from South & Southeast – Museum's collection (Sept - Dec 2006)

Electronic Music Lab exhibition (10 Feb – 26 Mar 2006)

Exuberance VI -NUSSU Film and Photography (11 - 31 Mar 2006)

Jamu Exhibition (10 – 30 Apr 2006)

The Keraton of Surakarta Exhibition & Body Art Competition (Jun – Aug 2006)

Soft launch of Tan Cheng Lock Baba House Museum (Sept 2006)

About the author

Ms Christine Khor has over 20 years of experience in the arts and the business of the arts in Singapore. She has served in the Singapore Tourism Board and Economic Development Board in the development of the arts industry and arts tourism, and was a journalist with Singapore Press Holdings and the first editor of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. Since January 2005, Ms Khor has been the Deputy General Manager at the NUS Centre For the Arts and she assumed the Directorship of the Centre from 1 October 2005.