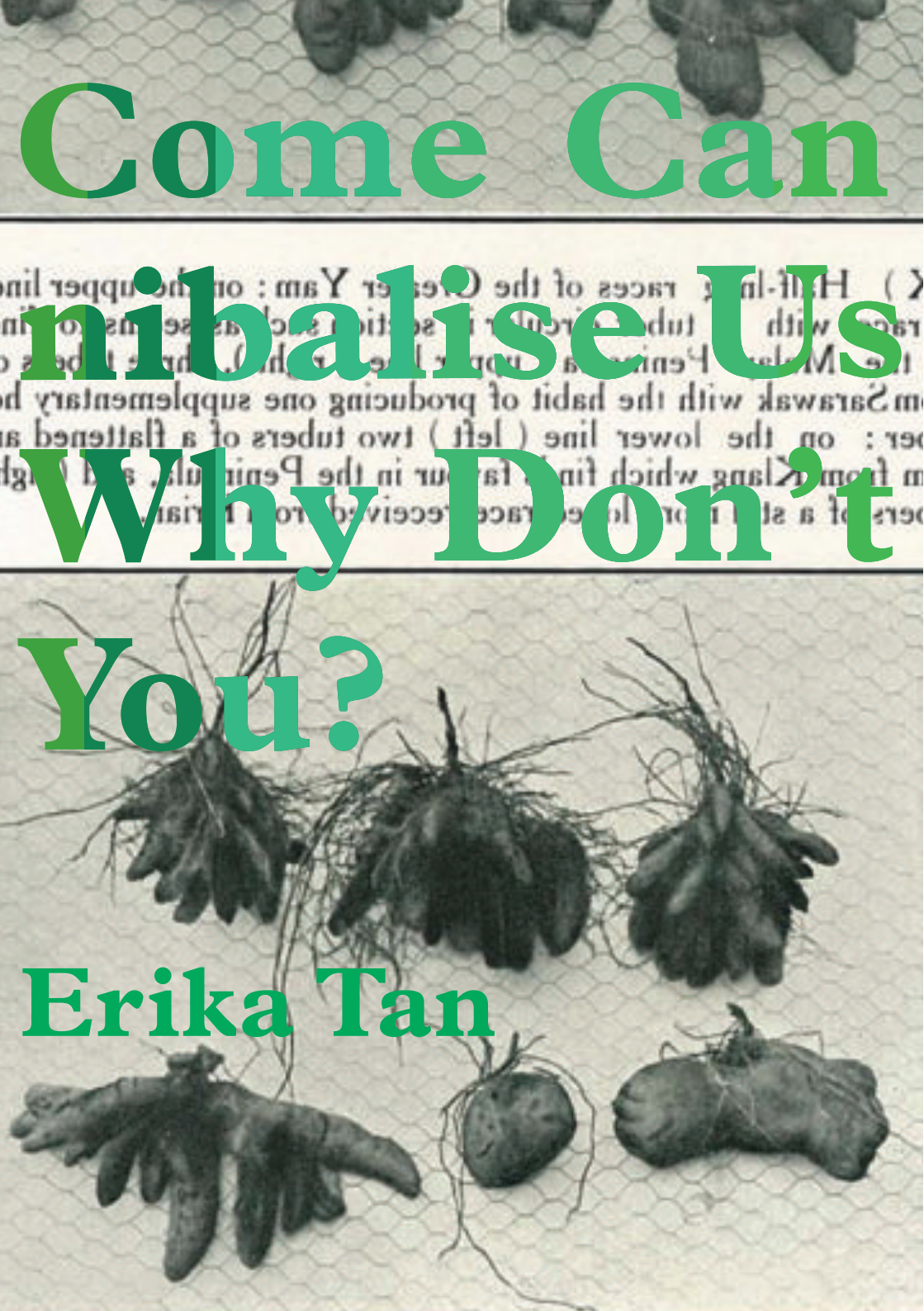
Come Can nibalise Us Why Don't You?



Erika Tan

Sila Menga kanibalkan Kami, Mah u Tak?

Erika Tan

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Re/View

Foreword

Ahmad Bin Mashadi

Come Cannibalise Us, Why Don't You? / *Sila Mengakanibalkan Kami, Mahu Tak?* is an outcome of a lengthy partnership between Erika Tan and Shabbir Hussain Mustafa. It is conceived as Tan's study and response to the Museum's 2011 exhibition *Camping And Tramping Through The Colonial Archive: The Museum In Malaya* (henceforth known as *Camping And Tramping*). As an exhibition that attempted to trace the origins and development of museum institutions in Singapore, *Camping And Tramping* may be distinguished by the documents assembled for the exhibition. These documents, organised and assembled as compilations around approximate themes and subjects, can only underline the provisionality which perhaps characterise our ambivalence to the museum and its colonial history. In *Come Cannibalise Us*, Tan remobilised these documents, stacked on a low pedestal and positioned centrally in the exhibition space along with several original exhibits from the earlier *Camping And Tramping* exhibition. This gesture is critical, strategic in its staging of potential lines of references and connections between the exhibitions, as well as between exhibits.

This partnership between Tan and Mustafa follows through from their partnership in 2009 in a (re)presentation of Tan's earlier project *Persistent Visions* at the Museum. Displayed in a gallery housing a collection of archaeological finds from Singapore and Southeast Asia, the 3-channel video produced out of film fragments from the collection of The British Empire & Commonwealth Museum, and the project form an attempt in activating interpretative possibilities that are relational and contextual, problematising the narrative alongside predicaments. Common between these artistic and curatorial undertakings mentioned were the very strategies of simultaneously assembling and reassembling the artifactual, conspicuously conflating the very acts of production and consumption as interactive and recursive. In *Come Cannibalise Us*, methodologies and technologies associated to the museum are presented as a series of disclosures, through which past 'incursions' may be described and newer 'incursions' can be enacted. In this regard, the structure of this publication and writers, conceived and selected by Tan, provides a necessary companion and outcome to the exhibition, to simultaneously unravel and complicate the museum and Museum as post-colonial site.

The NUS Museum congratulates both Tan and Mustafa for the exhibition and this publication. Assisting the two towards the completion of the project, the Museum also acknowledges Kenneth Tay for his curatorial contributions. We thank the various contributors for their invaluable writings and inputs.

Ahmad Bin Mashadi, Head of the National University of Singapore Museum

The Un/desirable Guest: Hospitality, Effective History And The (Post)Colonial Archive

Wenny Teo

'Come Cannibalise Us,Why Don't You? is a curious proposition, one first extended to the artist Erika Tan, and subsequently to us, as viewers and visitors. It is one we might find rather unsavoury at first, but nevertheless, our curiosity is piqued. What are we to make of this gratuitous offer on the part of the host museum in inviting an artist to feast upon the remains of a previous exhibition? Why serve up the spoils of the colonial archive, anthropomorphically re-imagined as a gruesome sacrifice, for our viewing pleasure? Is the artist bringing anything new to the table with this violent act of appropriation; and if we choose to take up this all too gracious invitation, how are we as fellow 'guests' at this unhomely banquet expected to respond in kind?

As the symbol of absolute alterity par excellence, the cannibal looms large in the global imaginary, agitating the fraught boundaries between inside and outside, civilised and savage, self and other. Indeed, few other figures traffic so fluidly between the viscera of disgust and desire. While the practice of anthropophagy (from Latin, 'man-eating') is said to have occurred under various conditions of ritual, survival, pathology and warfare throughout human history and across cultures, the term 'cannibal' itself is fairly recent, commonly traced back to15th century. It was Christopher Columbus no less who first used the term with reference to the rumoured man-eating practices of a bellicose tribe in the West Indies he heard of shortly after his 'discovery' of the Americas. While there remains significant doubt as to the veracity of Columbus's account, the voracity of the colonial appetite for the New World is well documented.[1] The savagery of cannibalism (whether real or imagined) was used to justify the savagery of colonialism, and thus 'literal' cannibalism begets 'metaphorical' cannibalism.[2] Every evocation of the man-eating myth is thus categorically disruptive – causing us to question the very boundaries between the civilised 'us' and the barbaric 'them' that the 'cannibal' appears to establish.

Indeed, no swashbuckling tale of colonial conquest is complete without a token and taboo cannibal encounter, and we need not trek too far back into our own colonial narrative to find evidence of this. In 1820, a year after the island of Singapore was absorbed into the British Empire, its founder Sir Stamford Raffles provided one such lurid account of cannibalism in a series of letters sent back home. Raffles had expressly made a voyage into the heart of the Malayan jungle to visit the Batak tribe of Tapanuli in order to 'satisfy [his] mind most fully in everything concerning their cannibalism,' as he put it.[3] Despite the sensational language he used to describe their culinary habits – 'the palms of the hands, and the soles of the feet are the delicacies of epicures!' – Raffles determined that the Bataks had a complex social structure, sophisticated legal system and penury code which mandated cannibalism as a form of capital punishment, first and foremost. In the tradition of Michel de Montaigne, Raffles ultimately characterised the Batak as noble savages whose 'virtue' and 'honesty' prompted the British statesman to meditate on the very 'right of capital punishment even among civilised nations.'[4] In fact, the Bataks proved such gracious hosts that Raffles contemplated returning to the jungle again with Lady Raffles to spend a few weeks among them as their guests.[5]

We find an altogether less fortunate account of native hospitality from further afield, and from a seemingly incongruous source. In one of his later works, the post-modern philosopher Jean Baudrillard described how in the 16th century, a cohort of Portuguese bishops travelled deep into the jungles of Recife in Brazil to celebrate the colonised natives' passive conversion to Christendom. However, instead of finding a welcome banquet in their honour as promised, the bishops were themselves 'devoured in an excessive display of evangelical love.'[6] This anecdote, Baudrillard proposed, allows us to think of cannibalism as 'an extreme form of hospitality:' a process of inverse introjection where power is undermined, or 'cannibalised' by the very people it 'carnivalises.'[7]

Hospitality then, is always a double-edged sword, and thus like cannibalism, functions as an appropriate tool to prise apart the messy business of (post)colonial exchange. For Derrida, genuine hospitality is an aphoria, for to be a host one must assume mastery over the hosted in the first place. In other words, hospitality is never altruistic but always conditional; the laws of hospitality circumscribed by systems of control and power, marked by authoritative boundaries that govern proper behaviour within the territorial remit of home, tribe, colony or nation.

Such a paradox is implicit in the etymology of 'hospitality' itself, which as Derrida put it, is a word that 'carries its own contradiction incorporated into it' allowing itself to be 'parasitized by its opposite, "hostility," the undesirable guest which it harbours as the self-contradiction in its own body.'[8] Under the intrusive conditions of colonialism, who is the undesirable guest? Who is the foreign body? Who has the right to 'host' and who is the 'parasite?' The notion of cannibalism as an extreme form of hospitality is thus apropos, as through the violating act of incorporating who is also the same, the cannibal collapses the very structures of identity, difference and authority it is invoked to support.[9]

In this vein, it would seem that the NUS Museum – the 'host' museum, as it were – has turned on itself by subjecting its own institutional foundations to radical critique; first through the exhibition *Camping And Tramping* and subsequently through *Come Cannibalise Us,Why Don't You?* Indeed, if 'knowing is a form of eating' as Sartre proposed, then we might think of the epistemology of the colonial museum itself as a form of institutionalised cannibalism: a means by which the spoils of colonial conquest – objects or specimens of cultural difference – were accumulated, assimilated and incorporated into an 'enlightened' body of knowledge that served to strengthen dominant discourses of power. By Foucault's definition, the museum is a unique spatial configuration proper to Western culture of the 19th century, keyed in the cannibalistic desire to 'accumulate' and absorb everything; 'to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes.'[10] The museum thus functions as a 'heterotopic' repository of accumulated time in which an endless play of domination is forever enshrined. A colonial

museum established in an occupied territory furthermore serves an acculturating function, force-feeding the coloniser's taxonomy, order, historical narrative and world-view back to the colonised subjects. Yet, Baudrillard reminds us, that this play of domination can also be reversed, or rather cannibalised. Cannibalism begets cannibalism, after all.

As the curator Shabbir Hussain Mustafa phrased it, *Camping And Tramping* specifically responded to the challenge of 'relaying the materiality of the museum into a narrative of postcolonial becoming; as an inquiry of the self and its constitution.'[11] This is not an act of wilful self-destruction but rather the attempt to subject the ontology of the museum itself to what Foucault termed 'genealogical' analysis towards an 'effective' history. If traditional history – theological or rationalistic – 'aims at dissolving the singular event into an ideal continuity – as a teleological movement or a natural process,' effective history does not present events as 'a decision, a treaty, a reign, or a battle, but the reversal of a relationship of forces, the usurpation of power, the appropriation of a vocabulary turned against those who had once used it, a feeble domination that poisons itself as it grows lax, the entry of a masked "other."'[12] In this, the museum always has the potential to be revivified, re-animated or even transmogrified into a host of ever emerging discontinuities, displacements, interruptions, and interpretations. Like cannibalism, effective history is categorically disruptive. *Come Cannibalise Us, Why Don't You?* pushes this virulent strain of historical efficacy further still by injecting the pathogenic figure of the artist-as-cannibal into the corpus of the colonial archive.

However, if *Camping And Tramping* was already a form of institutional self-cannibalism – or at least a self-critical inversion (or perversion) of the relationship of forces played out in the colonial encounter, then we must return to the question proposed earlier, of whether or not the artist brings anything new to the table by taking up the invitation to feed off and feed into its discursive and material remains. Is this an act of critical cannibalism or merely a distasteful postmodernist regurgitation? And what and where does that leave us as viewers and visitors?

As the Cuban writer Geraldo Mosquera argued, it is patently clear historically, 'all cultures "steal" from one another, be it from positions of dominance or subordination,' particularly in the context of today's hyper-networked 'global village.'[13] Indeed, the practices of cutting, pasting, sampling, re-mixing, de-constructing and re-semanticising – once forcefully commandeered by the European avant-garde as strategies of subversion – have arguably become so germane to the experience of everyday mass cultural experience that we are inured against their potentially disruptive effects. We live in a 'ready-made' culture where acts of appropriation, artistic or otherwise, no longer have the same critical bite.

Nevertheless, the cannibal trope retains its metaphorical purchase albeit in a ghostly form, summoned up again just as the boundaries between the real and virtual, original and copy, art and objecthood, become increasingly unstable or rather immaterial. As Fredric Jameson intoned in his seminal work, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, postmodern pastiche is but 'the random cannibalisation of all

styles of the past (…) representing a whole historically original consumer's appetite for a world transformed into sheer images of itself and for pseudo-events and spectacles.'[14] History is not only rendered ineffective but lost to us in a haphazard play of hollow signifiers. Art becomes just another commodity over-ripe for consumption, laid out like a delectable smorgasbord on the flatbed of the museum's ruins.

Consequently, despite the 'sensational frisson' invariably generated by the term 'cannibal' itself, the contemporary museum visitor, so inured against all forms of shock art, pop art, participatory and post-participatory practices, relational aesthetics and the like, has come to expect no less than a bloody feast for the eyes with a clever conceptual twist, and perhaps a free meal (human or otherwise) thrown into the mix for good measure, right before we exit through the gift-shop.

We might thus be surprised to find Erika Tan's artistic incursions into the space of the colonial archive far less intrusive than we imagined: counter-intuitively operating against the spectacular logic that flies under the banner of cannibalism. Hers is an art of provocatively precise moderation – sharp instances of subterfuge rendered in filmic syncopation; images stirring deliriously in their archival fever; elements of dissonance disquietingly introduced into the colonial body politic that play host to an active culture of unnerving associations. Tan mobilises techniques of re-use, re-enactment and repatriation in order to, in her words, 'raid the storehouse of dematerialised artefacts and dislocated events (…) and murmur a discourse in the contemporary present.'[15] To push the alimentary metaphors even further, we might think of this 'murmured' discourse as a rumbling rem(a)inder of that which remains 'indigestible' – that which still burns close to the heart of the postcolonial experience and its legacy, despite the all-encompassing hunger for multicultural inclusivity that seems to characterise discourses of art in today's 'global village.'

In this, the critical issue, and the historical efficacy, of the exhibition *Come Cannibalise Us, Why Don't You?* does not lie in the question of whether or not the artist brings something 'new' to the table, but how it serves to turn the tables on us as viewers and visitors. Cannibalism in this context no longer functions as a metaphor, but as an artistic methodology. Just as the artist is recast as cannibal in this metaphoric proposition, so too is the viewer, for the desire to look at art is after all, as George Bataille reminds us, always an 'act of appropriation,' the eye a 'cannibal delicacy,' for 'to desire is to contaminate; to desire is to take.'[16] And yet the work of art is a moveable feast; just as the museum is not a fixed repository of knowledge, but a discursive organism that plays host to a live culture of micro-narratives and contaminated histories.

Babel Of Yam

Adele Tan

'You have the yam and you have the knife; we cannot eat unless you cut us a piece. We are like ants in your sight.' Chinua Achebe, *No Longer At Ease*

It was a bunch of white bulbous knobs lying in a Perspex display case in the exhibition, right above a group of labelled taxidermied birds. I gravitated towards those unannotated alien white knobs, trying to make sense of what they might be. They vaguely resembled fingers of excrement but at the same time rhizomic gingers, blessed as they were to be lying next to a small statuette of the Virgin Mary and child Jesus. It was not until a week after I first clapped eyes on them that the artist offered up its true being – they were 'fake' yams. I had apparently missed reading an exhibition booklet that contained the clues to its substance. Yams are a vegetable that I mildly detest though mostly indifferent to, and they are familiar enough in our Southeast Asian diet and vernacular. I usually think nothing of yams but this time I was intrigued by these fabricated root vegetables. I have long associated yams with the introduction of Africa and the history of colonisation to my youthful and naïve fifteen-year-old mind. I remember vividly the strangeness of Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* and the centrality of its exotic yam festivals and rituals to its plot. I knew very little about Africa and Nigeria except that the Commonwealth bonded our countries, the quaint collective term for territories of the former British Empire. Achebe's book, along with Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o's, were prescribed texts for Cambridge O-Level exams, and they were my first literary initiations to the regime that we now know as colonialism.

Yam in Achebe's novels is a prestige food and of prime symbolic significance – it is the king of crops; it stands for manliness, wealth and the man's stature in his community. The mark of a great man is measured by his ability to feed his family on yams from one harvest to the next. And because growing yams is labour intensive, the cultivation of the crop is almost exclusively performed by males (women prepare and cook the yams), with the size of his fields and harvests in the man's barns indicative of the strength of his work ethic. Marriages are celebrated with yam feasts and the New-Yam festival marks the passing of a year. 'To have the yam and have the knife' is also a common African expression of the centralisation of power and resources, usually in reference to a deity but also persons perceived by their community as leaders who are rich, respected and influential. It is indubitable therefore that yams and their possessors have a superior mark of distinction, setting themselves apart from the lesser mortals and less important plants. In *Things Fall Apart*, however, fate takes a different tragic turn for yams. The failed harvests of yams through floods drove men to suicide and the redefinition of the value of yams in Umofia underscores the destruction of traditional Igbo tribal culture with the coming of colonisation and Christianity. Here the fall in the value of yams follows the path of decline of a well-worn set of customs and beliefs, uprooted (pardon the pun) by the arrival of the missionaries. Not only has the white man brought with him a new religion, he also planted the seeds for modernisation and capitalism: the colonials exploited new cash crops like oil palms whose kernels could be used to extract valuable oil and incited the advent of trade and trading posts, from which more money flowed in and began to lubricate the wheels of change. For many African scholars, yams appear as central motifs in the colonial narrative, replicated through Western academic textbooks, but only as a crop of use or exchange value and with which one can track the advancement (or stasis) of Africa from primitive production methods to that of industrial modernisation.[17] The symbolic and spiritual value of yam to its community was thereby cast aside, until picked up by African fiction writers. This urgent fervour to observe and trace the cultivational (and by extension, economic) values of agricultural crops was also seen at the Malaya-Borneo Exhibition (Singapore, April, 1922), whereby agricultural and horticultural objects were collected from all parts of the Malay Peninsula, including Sarawak and Brunei, and offered an unequalled opportunity of information-gathering regarding native crops. Exhibitors were later persuaded to give many of their exhibits to the Botanic Gardens, and with this a set of yams went into cultivation in the Economic Garden for better study.

What has all this got to do with the 'fake' yams in Erika Tan's exhibition *Come Cannibalise Us, Why Don't You?*, you ask. The artist had purposefully fashioned stand-ins for real yams, look-alikes of the vegetable, but in so doing began to cast some doubts in my mind about the place of yams in the history of Malaya and also to the veracity of the name of yam and what qualified as a 'true' yam. Whilst basing her jesmonite-cast yams on the plant images from the Malaya-Borneo exhibition, she had in fact materialised her 'fake' yams by resorting to the use of London-bought Bangladeshi yams (she could not find Malaysian yams that were imported into the UK, a situation which she took as indicative of the state of post-colonial relations reflected in the stagnating UK-Malay trade) and thus remodelling its entire appearance. As suggested by the exhibition title, the figure of the cannibal was a pejorative construct within the dark stories of primitivism but to cannibalise was also to use parts of something to repair something else. She could be seen as taking liberties with yams to speak about the idiosyncrasies of rational typologies, restoring the actual disorderly world of lived local experience and naming conventions and confusions into the museal efforts to know and categorise into strict scientific specifications. And perhaps she was onto something and maybe we did not know the yam at all. The 'fake' yams were signs of an epistemological defectiveness and were ready to confound nomenclatural classifications. The artist's ruse was already announced in her exhibition guide; it was a willed re-enactment of the yam but at the same time making a mockery of the rules of museum display. The ICOM handbook of protocols demands that museums 'respect the integrity of the original when replicas, reproductions, or copies of items in the collection are made. All such copies should be permanently marked as facsimiles'.[18] There were no labels for the artist's yams as her 'fake' yams could only imperfectly become a facsimile of the archival photo-referent of the Malaya-Borneo Exhibition.

(X) Half-long races of the Greater Yam : on the upper line (left), a race with a tuber circular in section such as seems to find favour in the Malay Peninsula : upper line (right), three tubers of a race from Sarawak with the habit of producing one supplementary horizontal tuber : on the lower line (left) two tubers of a flattened and lobed yam from Klang which finds favour in the Peninsula, and (right) three tubers of a still more lobed race received from Krian.

(Y) Upper line, a peculiarly branched race of the Greater Yam sent from Raub with the name of Ubi sekok ; and below (left) two tubers a flattened very smooth race from Brunei, and (right) a much flattened and branched race from Klang.

SOME YAMS OF THE MALAY PENINSULA AND BORNEO.

She could only reproduce eight out of the nine yams originally shown in the photo-referent, despite displaying them in the same order, hampered as she was by other real-time conservation issues that dictated which other museum objects could be in close proximity to her renegade yams. So therefore in all honesty, one should transpose the replication process onto another plane – that of the aesthetic. In other words, the 'fake' yams (in a performative method of 'passing') then becomes a work of art, like the other little handmade green postcard-paintings festooned with archival images that are in the same exhibition.

But what exactly is an original yam when different peoples around the world embrace and happily misrecognise other plant species to be yams or formal relatives of it? The museal integrity here that cannot be faithfully respected becomes an aesthetic opportunity for the artist to exploit. Contemporary artworks are in a habit of keeping a distance from explanatory labels, as were the 'fake' yams on display, though this became uncannily in keeping with the advice supplied by J. C. Moulton in the 1920 Museum and Library Annual Report, who argues that:

Although there is much to be said in favour of 'a collection of labels illustrated by specimens' as the ideal educational Museum, it is thought that in Singapore, where a large percentage of the visitors cannot read any language, labels must not predominate. Simple explanatory labels are being prepared in addition to the usual small name-labels, bearing the Latin, English and native names. The question of preparing labels in native languages, e.g. Malay, Chinese and Tamil, has been held over provisionally, until the groundwork of re-arrangement and re-labelling has been accomplished.[19]

But it is precisely in this world of naming, labelling and language that yams demonstrate their capacity to thwart or delay disciplinary efforts in regulating their existence. The accomplishment of sorting out the yams from each other and from their actual Others runs into ludic and epic proportions, if one has to take into account species names in a myriad of languages.[20]

Delving deeper into the wider world of yams, I discover the panoply of plants misattributed as yams or seeking kinship with it, much of it occurring in local or regional parlance. And because yams have been naturalised throughout tropical South America, Asia, Africa, Australia, the South-eastern parts of the United States, the yam has many different common names from these regions. Several species of edible tubers in the genus *dioscorea* are known as yams. Our region's true yams are the lavender to purple varieties of the species *dioscorea alata* (commonly known as the greater yam or water yam, with the lesser yam known as *dioscorea esculenta*, though the Okinawan purple 'yam' is in fact a sweet potato), and also the Chinese and Japanese yam (*dioscorea opposita*), known as *huai shan* in Chinese and *nagaimo* in Japanese, though as long slender variants they bear little resemblance to their white and purple cousins. Yet the Chinese often mistake taro (genus: *colocasia*) for yam, with both Chinese terms for these vegetables sharing the common word 'yu' (as in *yu tou* for taro and *shan yu* for yam) in them. Incidentally, taro is also colloquially named cocoyam in Africa, adding another layer of mystification. Americans and some Canadians love to call their sweet potatoes (genus: *ipomoea*) yams, and funnily enough, the jicama or bangkwang is baf-

flingly termed yam bean, although being related to neither. There are also vegetables called the elephant foot yam and the konjac yam, neither of which are yams but are from the taro family. A popular ingredient in many sweet desserts in Southeast Asia, the *dioscorea alata*, or greater yam, is known as 'ube' in the Philippines and as 'ubi' in Indonesia, although 'ubi' itself as a word in the Malay language describes an underground root, and so is included in the names of many of the root vegetables known to Southeast Asia like potato (*ubi kentang*) sweet potato (*ubi keledek*), taro (*ubi keladi*) and cassava (*ubi kayu*). Even in places where dioscorea plants are generally uncommon, such as New Zealand, a popular imported Andean tuber called *oca* (*uqa* in Quechua or oxalis *tuberosa*) introduced to New Zealand in 1860 has been thereby known as the New Zealand yam. That there are over 600 cultivars of yam in the world and that we find difficulty in visually distinguishing true yams from 'fake yams' like taro, sweet potatoes and cassava, probably goes some way in explaining the cause of the nomenclatural mess. Folk classifications, of which some are based on morphology, some on the history of its transplantation, and some on flavour or texture, will always find some way to trump scientific consistency.[21]

But there is another quality that I admire in the yam – its element of toxicity. Yams contain oxalate compounds that can irritate skin membranes and have to be subjected to cooking or long soaking in water to remove or neutralise the compounds. Some yam variants contain the more deadly compounds such as diosbulbin and saponins, which can cause paralysis. Beyond its use as a commercial crop, native communities have also used extracts of yam toxins to immobilise fish for capture, bait monkeys and poison their arrows or darts in their hunt for wildlife. This can only remind me of Jacques Derrida's rendering of the 'pharmakon' as both poison and remedy, each harbouring the other within itself ambivalently, and is irreducible to simplistic binary and oppositional concepts but disorientates and produces a constant flicker in our vision, thinking and writing. With the (copied) yam installed and seen as a 'pharmakon' in the made-up archive of the artist, it can by way of having 'no stable essence' nor 'proper characteristics', begin to incite the movement, the play of crossing sides, by being the link, the locus of the archive, because it is not anymore a substance but instead 'the prior medium in which differentiation in general is produced'.[22] The babel of yam that ensues can only be a productive, difficult and sometimes violent mode of interpretative undecidability against definitive assignations.

Image credit: Yams At The Malaya, Borneo Exhibition, I. H. Burkhill, 1923

'Repatriating The Object With No Shadow'

Kenneth Tay

By the time Walter Benjamin completed his seminal essay, 'The Work of Art in The Age of Mechanical Reproduction' in 1936,[23] across the Atlantic, the establishment of the now famous Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) was already well under way. This link between Benjamin's essay and the museum is not an arbitrary one; for while it is that Benjamin wrote with an emphasis on the newer technologies of film and photography, he was also responding to the question of the museum. After all, it was no mere coincidence that Benjamin distinguished between the ritual function of what he called 'cult value' and the display function of what he perhaps more famously termed 'exhibition value'. That is, there is an affinity between the operating logic of museums and the way in which film and photography have allowed us to see the world in a whole different light: the ability to take a snapshot of the world and to eventually go on to display/displace it onto a new context essentially parallels the ways in which objects were moved – sometimes stolen – from their original homes and displayed in museums halfway round the world. Here, the mass relocation of people into new and modern cities is similarly symptomatic of just such a new 'order'. Against the violent flux and maddening rush of modernity, film, photography, and museums facilitated a sense in which order can be felt, if not made.

Yet, as Benjamin observes by way of Nazi Germany's propaganda materials, this is not without its troubling implications. To uproot values of an older (and perhaps flawed) tradition only to consolidate a new framing of the world (be it through film, photography or the spatial grammar of a museum exhibition) merely betrays its own logic of instability. Any fixed image produced as such is always only a freeze-frame in transit: one that is always threatening to move onto the next scene, always already haunted by the potential to undo itself. Rather than remain hung up on the specificities of the medium, for Benjamin film becomes a medium through which one could think of the world: that is, the world as already a moving image, always flickering, and always already becoming (other). And it is precisely this unpredictable future that is the hope Benjamin leaves us with at the end of his essay.

It is also in this sense that we might come to see objects in a museum as existing in this state of perpetual homelessness, never really looking at home at any one stage. What would it take for us then to repatriate these objects? But before that, is there even a proper home that we could speak of in the first place? These questions illuminate for us the 'shadows' of these objects; they reveal the fundamental uncertainty and demands these objects make of us. At once terrifying, at once exhilarating, these 'shadows' continue to move us despite the blinding light of day. In a photosensitive culture which valorises the need for clarification, illumination and revelation, perhaps our first step would be to recognise that too much of an overexposure and there would be nothing left for us to see.

Works

Come Cannibalise Us, Why Don't You?
Sila Mengkanibalkan Kami, Mahu Tak?

Erika Tan

Come Cannibalise Us, Why Don't You?
Sila Mengkanibalkan Kami, Mahu Tak?

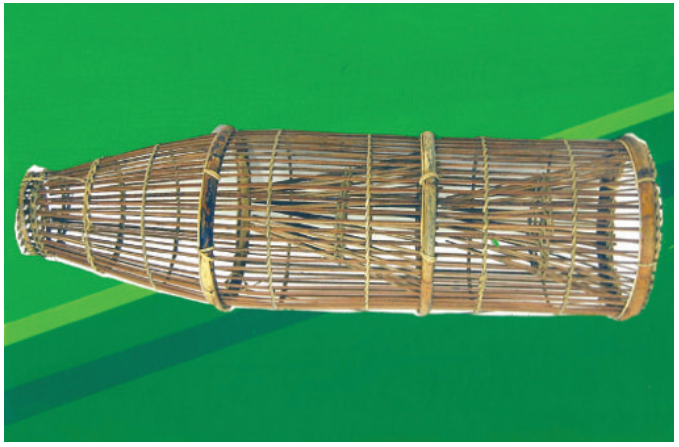
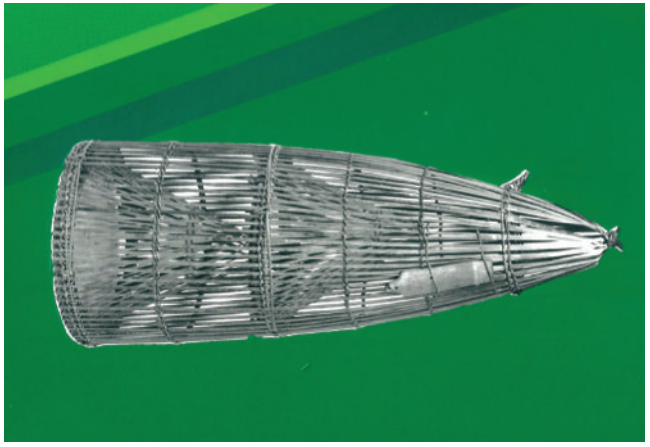
Emerging from an ongoing discussion between NUS Museum curators and artist Erika Tan since 2009 about the multitudinous potentials of the museumised object, the colloquially titled *'Come Cannibalise Us, Why Don't You?'* is an artist's response that re-visits through re-use, re-enactment and repatriation, the artefacts and writings from, and referenced in, the exhibition *Camping And Tramping Through The Colonial Archive: The Museum in Malaya* (2011–13). In addition, newer artworks developed by the artist that include film, objects and works on paper are shown alongside. The guiding principle being a form of aesthetic cannibalism, speculative in its *method* and oscillating between formats, the site-specific installation reveals the contingent rules and contextual considerations of the colonial museum in Malaya as it came to be formed in the 19th century and the particular interpretative technologies and translationary *mediums* that continue to murmur a discourse in the contemporary postcolonial museum of Singapore and in the dis-located Southeast Asian collections elsewhere.

Exhibition text, Shabbir Hussain Mustafa & Erika Tan
NUS Museum, Singapore, 2014








The Moral Green Interweb

Shabbir Hussain Mustafa & Erika Tan

Erika Tan, *Persistent Visions*, NUS Museum, 2008

SHM: Going through this process, of first discussing the problematics of *Camping and Tramping*, and later facilitating your cannibalism of the same objects, and despite our differences in approaches, if we were obsessed with anything, it was the relation of culture to the moral imagination of the object. You approached it from the side of repatriation; I came at it from the side of retention. But in your work, to portray an object betwixt and between that mysterious conjunction of recurrence when it is taken as a work of art – a conjunction we have agonised with since our engagement began in 2008 (when the NUS Museum showed *Persistent Visions* [2005]) – I think we can meet. What I am (probably) getting at here is that, it does not matter whether we agree with the deconstructivist logic of simply recovering these stories and leaving it at that, or if indeed these objects ought to be returned to maker, source community, whoever: the moral imagination of the object may just be a single subject of inquiry.

Erika Tan, *Come Cannibalise Us, Why Don't You?*, NUS Museum, 2013

Opposite: Slab Grave, Raffles Museum display c1950s, collection of National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board

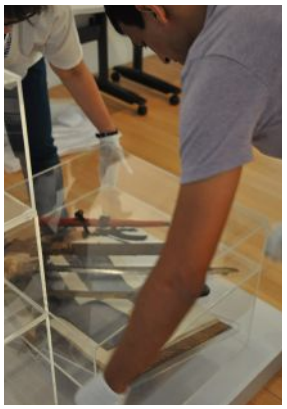
ET: The narrative you present Mustafa is interesting. It presents the kinds of binaries or tensions one might expect when artist and museum meet, however, this would be to down-play the kind of work you as a curator have already been working around, and to perhaps fall into the trap of seeing this project as a form of institutional critique. *Camping And Tramping* for me was not just an exercise in 'recovery' and 'retention' but more the foregrounding of the *on-going* possibility for objects to have multiple roles, meanings and use. We discussed in relation to *Persistent Visions* the notion of subaltern voices, their absence or their implied but muted presence, then as now, my project seems to be one of finding *our* own voices within/despite/because of the competing narratives delivered to us. The museum is but one place in which this possibility needs to become apparent, not purely or indeed because of ethical issues, or moral issues towards as you say, maker, source community, but because I feel interpretation should not be co-opted with issues around ownership. In this respect, 'repatriation' for me, is not the

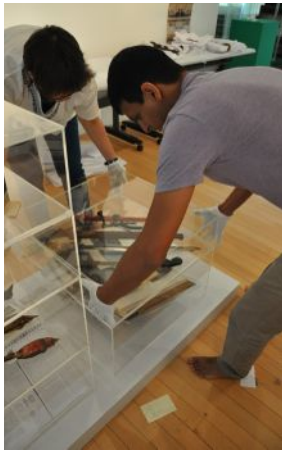
Mustafa performing Remnants From *The Corner Of My Eye*, a re-enactment gesture towards the Dayak model house and Erika setting up *Turning In wonder, Come Cannibalise Us,Why Don't You?*, NUS Museum 2013

physical, material and geographical 'return' of an object, but a movement of sorts that extricates the object from proprietorial notions of interpretation and value. In *Come Cannibalise Us,Why Don't You?* one of the explorations has been around introducing an instability of form, a kind of 'shape shifting'. This takes the form of replica yams, *fimo* adze heads, digital *youtube* videos returned to film, of British Museum artefacts re-materialised as paintings. Ultimately the exercise is one of producing a reflexive approach to systems of knowledge and cultural production, where the question of the moral is not already a given. It's also one of circulating and re-circulating as a form of preservation (preservation of the objects on-going possibilities).

SHM: Within the circulation and re-circulation there are particular modes of working determined by the levels of institutionalisation of practices. Within this, the modern artist possesses a tremendous advantage when making statements through their art to the general public. One critical feature being that very few of those listening or reading would have much in the way of independent knowledge of the supposed proposition being retailed. I understand, this is a very restricted sense of the term 'artist', but I present it here as a provocation to the modernist claim that art rests within a sovereign realm, and the artist may take particular liberties in its production and presentation, and even remain absolutely stubborn by denying 'access' to the works. This is usually not the case for the modern curator, who is faced with the unattractive choice of boring his/her public with massive amounts of exotic information or attempting to make his argument in an effectual vacuum. In many ways, this project was about testing those limits…?

ET: I'm not sure it's helpful to create or re-inscribe the dichotomy of curator/artist – or that of material culture vs. art object as it obscures perhaps the institutional and individual positions and alignments (there are choices). Certainly curators in museums which sign up to the ICOM's Code Of Ethics For Museums[1] are faced with a series of protocols to uphold – e.g. Point 4.2, 'Museums should ensure that the information they present in displays and exhibitions is well-founded, accurate and gives appropriate consideration to represented groups and people'; so perhaps it depends on what kind of a museum one is talking about, or what context the art work is shown within and whether you are interested in problematising these terms such as 'accurate' and 'well founded'. In the exhibition *Come Cannibalise Us,Why Don't You?* all the works were shown without captions (including the artefacts on loan from other museums). There was a booklet contextualising the works through a series of fragmented archival images and texts, there was the exhibition catalogue of *Camping And Tramping*, and there were the research binders originally shown within *Camping And Tramping*. In the video work *Repatriating The Object With No Shadow: Along, Against, Within And Through*, there were also references back towards the other objects on display. The connections (or gaps) are necessarily made by the audience. This is not about the sovereignty of the artist or artwork, or 'refusing access', but the opposite. Meaning here is contingent, specific, and personalised. The green screen is no less neutral than the white cube (not that NUS Museum can in any way be seen as a white cube), but for me indicates much more readily the dis-locational technologies at work. Perhaps also, with its reference to cinema, the green screen speaks more openly about the prospects of fantasy and projection entering the frame. Once the object/actor has been transported (via green screen back-lot or museological processes), technically, anything should be able to happen, can happen and has happened. What limits or shapes this comes back to us.

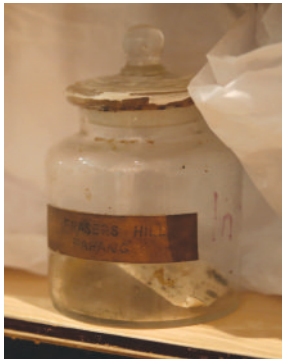




SHM: This re-framing was always a curios one. Perennially driven by this confusion, estrangement and intimacy with the 19th century that we have both shared over the course of this collaboration. Mining the colonial text at different platforms, seeking techniques, modes of working and unstructured gestures and murmurs, we assumed that it might just be possible to narrow our differences and recover something of an aesthetic imagination of peoples separated from us by time and intellectual disposition, maybe even add something to the history of modernism in the region. I am not sure to what extent each of us succeeded, we probably knew that this premise

was foolish to begin with (?), but nonetheless we marched on, armed with their lineaments, seeking those informal and unspoken suppositions, those that might allow us to locate even the faintist traces of a Southeast Asian (or perhaps, Malayan) aesthetic insight. In this push though, I am unsure if we did end up glancing over affirmations and critical moorings about the nature of 'art' that ran counter to or existed simultaneously to our own reigning convictions. Or perhaps, if we are too highly embedded in the setting of the 'modern museum' and 'contemporary practice' that forever gets in the way rather than releases, when we encounter objects that had supposedly mattered deeply to Others. It's odd, I never cite him, but Geertz captures this dilemma, he says: 'that the significant works of the human imagination (Icelandic saga, Austen novel, or Balinese cremation) speak with equal power to the consoling piety that we are all like one another and to the worrying suspicion that we are not.'

ET: Perhaps a failure in this project is that having started with colonial texts, it was very unlikely that the Southeast Asian aesthetic imaginings that you pointed to would ever manifest, other than as footnotes, marginal texts and as you say murmurings. There are many dead ends also and things that still need following up. What happened to Din Bin Brahim, Ivor Evans's suggested romantic as well as domestic companion? Left with half the curator's ethnographer's estate, what did he go on to do? And what about Halimah Binti Abdullah, the Weaver from Singapore who died in London during her stay there as a human display in the *The Empire Exhibition*, (Wembley, 1924/5)? The hundreds of animals Prince Edward donated to the London Zoo after their display in *The Malaya-Borneo Exhibition* (Singapore, 1922), or the materials and models for the Malay village displays in the *The Colonial and Indian Exhibition*, (London,1886), *The Festival of Empire Exhibition* (Crystal Palace, 1911) or the Malaya pavilion in *The Empire Exhibition* (Wembley, 1924/5). Some of these remnants surface in the catalogues of The British Museum or The Victoria & Albert Museum, and other traces elsewhere. There are very few images I can find documenting the Malayan elements of these exhibitions, but fragments like the newspaper clipping below, give a



loaded description: 'There are to be seen at times in the Malay houses erected on piles in the gardens of the Exhibition some specimens of the inhabitants of this part of the world. They are not quite so ferocious-looking as the popular imagination designates their race, but still look as if they could be awkward upon very slight provocation. As they walk about with a slouching gait, they evidently inspire different feelings from what the moody-looking Chinamen do in the Hongkong Court.'[2]

The (attempted) recovery or 'repatriation' of these material objects, became a route through which to approach 'other histories' or 'lost modernisms' within the transnational context of Singapore, Malaysia and Britain. The project took me to Taiping (site of Malaysia's first museum, and a once pivotal town in the British Federated States of Malaya), to 'recover' the colonial museum, only to find that it was too late. Its colonial hard wood carved display cases were being replaced with new laminated plywood designs; its early painted dioramas (also associated with Raffles Museum's previous display formats) had just been updated with digital backdrops (ironically photo-shopped to look like oil paintings), its books being packed up for restoration, its colonial collections being re-distributed around the country and displays reformulated to reflect a more localised nationalist focus. The museum's own knowledge of its colonial history, its accessions, books and colonial remnants had somehow been lost, rendering its curators reliant upon Wikipedia to help in my research.

The missing links, the gaping holes, lost moments – these for me are still the location where things might happen. My somewhat haphazard anthropological approach to the colonial archive, giving it the status of 'local informant', has not brought me to an external 'source', but rather a reminder, that in the world of contemporary art, the artists themselves might be (mis) taken for the 'local informant', the 'source community' or the 'anthropologist', or indeed they might choose to take up these possible roles with all their attendant complexities and problematics knowingly.

Vocationem Universalem / Universal Call

Erika Tan

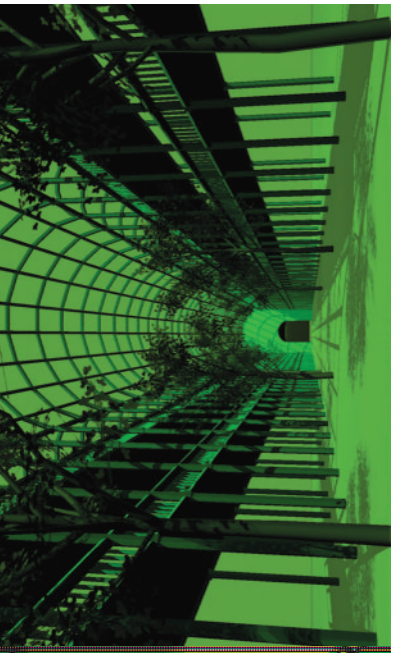
The script excerpts are adaptations from the speeches, public addresses, reports and articulations between 1874 and 1977 of the following individuals:
D.H. Hodgson, Ivor H.N. Evans, James Collins, H.N. Ridley, Roland Braddell, Governor Fredrick Weld, Archdeacon Hose, R. Hanitsch, E.J.H. Corner, Eric R. Alfred, J.C. Moulton, Constance Sheares, Cecil Boden Kloss, Dr. G.D. Haviland and T.S. Raffles.

All images are stills from the video work *Vocationem Universalem / Universal Call*.

Script excerpts:

[From] what I can remember of my own early impressions, I believe that I pictured a dark gloomy forest where the light of day hardly penetrated, and where walking was almost an impossibility. This sombre scene was relieved by the presence of gorgeously coloured and strongly perfumed flowers depending from trailing creepers, which hung from tree to tree. In addition to the flowers there were brilliantly plumaged birds, which flittered from bough to bough before the traveller, while troops of monkeys chattered and screamed among the branches overhead. Enormous butterflies with jewelled wings sailed across the open spaces in the forest, and gigantic horned beetles watched the intruder from every log of rotting wood. Pythons curled themselves round branches overhanging the only track, herds of tapirs, pigs or deer, frightened at the approach of human beings, stampeded through the undergrowth of graceful palms and tree ferns which reared their heads on all sides, and the atmosphere was that of a hot-house in the museum's gardens.[3]

Later still a Museum or Museums are formed, with scientific men attached who, assisted at least by the Government, are able to devote their time to collecting and preserving specimens, as well as recording observations and data, and storing the specimens in the Museums for



reference, and publishing the information obtained in reports or publication.[4]

… it is essential that the traveller should not trust this to his memory, … Everything should be noted down in such a way that it would be intelligible to a person absolutely ignorant of the country.

The collected information should differentiate between information obtained by personal observation and that obtained on the testimony of others.[5]

The Central Hall now holds the statue of the founder, which was brought to the Museum for safety. Behind it is a case showing some of his letters and early history. On the walls are paintings of the early settlements. Immediately on the left of the entrance is the sole fragment of the great stone with indecipherable inscription, which stood at the mouth of the River when the founder first landed.[6]

The countries under our influences are of surpassing interest and great natural wealth. Their development and progress under the protection of the flag for the last hundred years and more has provided a chapter in the history of ~~the~~ [our] Empire, of which we who come after may well be proud. That such a great variety and wealth of exhibits, illustrating the actual and potential resources of these countries, can be gathered together to form our Exhibition is due to the sure foundations laid by those early Empire-builders whose names will ever live in the history of our enterprise. It is hoped that an Exhibition, such as the one now planned, will be made worthy of our illustrious forebears. 'Our object is not territory but trade.' ~~His~~ [The] aim was to establish a great commercial emporium, a free port which should attract the trade of all surrounding countries.[7]

Notwithstanding the contributions of its handful of professional staff to scholarship throughout its long history, the Museum remained, little more than a storehouse of the material evidence and remains of the fauna and flora, and of the material cultures of the peoples of the region.[8]

A Museum which makes any pretence of being a scientific institution must adopt as a basic principle that science is 'ordered knowledge'. The work of classification is therefore to be regarded as of primary importance.[9]

The object of an ethnological collection is mainly to illustrate and to afford a sure and ready means of comparing the modes of living and customs of different people represented in the collection. An ethnological collection to be of real value should be made systematically, and with an end in view; every object should be carefully and properly labelled… mere unlabelled curios are not worth the cost of housing and caring for. Most of the ethnological specimens now in the Museum have no label or history….[10]

[Additionally we have as yet] no satisfactory method devised by which the specimens can be preserved for any length of time with fidelity… The deteriorating influences of the ~~tropical~~ [hot] and extremely moist climate is such that collections ~~of butterflies and moths~~ exposed to the light rapidly lose their colour and it is therefore important to arrange that specimens that have not been subjected to these influences…

Nations, governments and races rise, decline, and fall but science, which extols human nature, rises only.[11]

If the time shall come when we shall have passed away, these monuments of our virtue will endure when our triumphs shall have become an empty name. Let it still be our boast to write our name in characters of light; let us not be remembered as the tempest whose course was desolation, but as the gate of ~~spring~~ [morning] reviving the slumbering seeds of mind, and calling them to life from the ~~winter~~ [evening] of ignorance and oppression. Let our Sun arise on these islands, not to wither and scorch them in its fierceness, but like that of our ~~own genial~~ [more genial] skies, whose mild and benignant influence is hailed and blessed by all who feel its beams.[12]

The rays of intellect, now divided and lost, will be concentrated into a focus, from whence they will be again radiated with added lustre, brightened and strengthened by our superior lights. Thus will our stations not only become the centres of commerce and its luxuries, but of refinement and the liberal arts.[13]

Repatriating The Object With No Shadow: Along, Against, Within And Through

Erika Tan

Repatriating The Object With No Shadow: Along, Against, Within And Through takes the structure of an A to Z (a 'gesture' towards the encyclopedic or comprehensive), to approach a glossary of terms/ events/ artefacts/ and personal accounts which connect us to the historical through the specifics and the context of the colonial museum in Malaya.

A is for adventure, advantage and advocate

It was in 1914, I was on a collecting expedition with the Director of the Museum, 100 miles up the River. We had planned to trek further into the interior, when the war cries of the tribes people spread through the jungle and they were on the path thirsting for heads, our 100 porters left us, and there we were, a small body of 17 collectors.[14]

The colonial archive is littered with 'we set off at day break' accounts. The history of collecting cannot be seen without some recourse to the discourse of adventure and exploration. It would seem that they go hand in hand. So too, the accounts of illness; many an ill fated expedition ended up aborted, with fever wracked bodies being sent back to milder climates. The accounts seem to heave with unspoken dangers, of illness, poison darts, un-faithful porters, but equally the numbers accumulated of dead stuffed embalmed dried cooked deboned animal carcasses, crated and ferried across and through the jungle, rivers, seas to museums, zoos, and private collections seem enough to prove some sort of advantage. An advantage in the technologies of dislocation.

Advocacy is when we speak for something or someone, often assumed unable to be otherwise heard.

B is for body

I was looking for bodies, bodies of knowledge, forgotten bodies and the kind of bodies that might make you think, think differently. A small paragraph in Raffles Museum's Annual Report describes the museum's most popular and curious object; the cast of a Malay man.

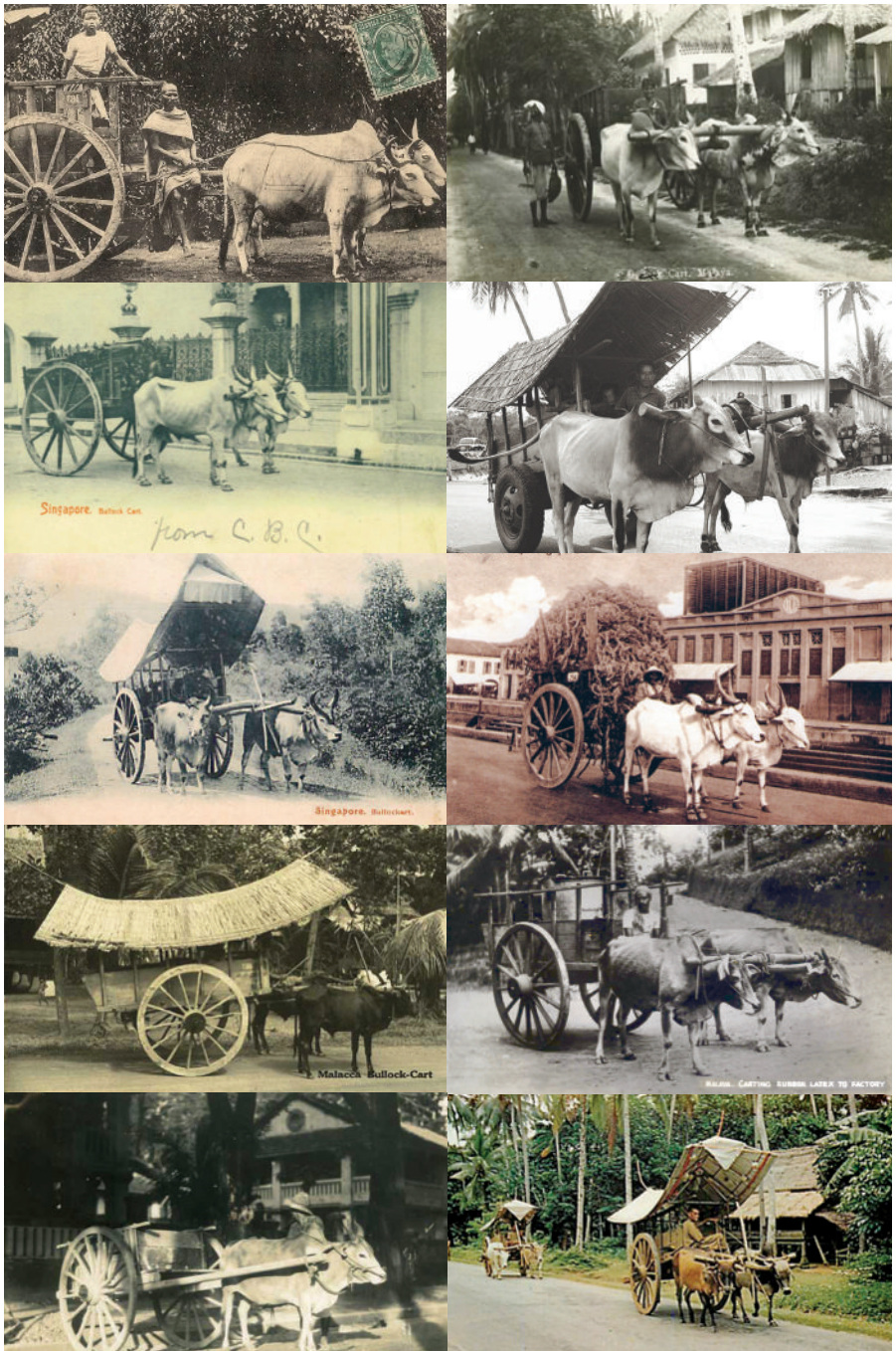
'One of The Raffles Museum's most popular artefact was a life-size model of a Malay man dressed in traditional clothes, or *baju kurung* complete with *sarong* and *kris*. A museum staff had volunteered to have his body cast in plaster for this purpose. The life-like model led some visitors to believe it had been made using the same method of skinning and stuffing the creatures found in the animal gallery of the museum.'[15]

He was willing. Do you know the process of casting the human body? Incarcerated in slowly fixing plaster. The process of *going off* is a chemical reaction. The heat slowly swells, and from worrying not to move, you realise you no longer can move. Fixed, held in place.

I think about re-casting a Malay body, re-casting physically and metaphorically. We do not know the name of the Malay man who lent his body for the cast, but we know his designation. Working in the museum as a *jagar* (watchman), or janitor, or caretaker. The Museum is a hierarchical place, directors are like gods, who give (or not) permission to access this cultural resource, our heritage, the intellectual capital of our nations, or in the colonial museum, the temporarily appropriated nations of others, or for some museums the more permanently held intellectual property of other nations. The Director is the man that wears socks, the *jagar*, warden, invigilator or caretaker, the one who does not.

Returning to our cast Malay body, this object was never accessioned, which means although it may have been a part of the display within the museum, it was never a part of its collections. So too the support structures, the plinths, the vitrines, the things that both protect and hold up and fix the objects in time and place. They are dispensable. The Malay man, was only a cast, a mannequin with local features, something to demonstrate the wearing of *sonket* and *sarong*. I think about Ahmad, the current director of the museum [NUS Museum] and think about casting his body. I imagine the process of applying Vaseline to all his body parts, I imagine the conversation during the time it would take to complete this and I imagine the care and control I would need and have over this body during this period of incarceration. I do not ask him to undress for me. There is no subservient Malay body here this time.

C is for copy, cartography and cartwheel



D is for Din, Din Bin Brahim

Mt Kinabalu (over 13,000 ft), Mt Nungkok (right) and the Kadamaian (Tempasuk) valley from Kota Belud

In one of Ivor Evans last published books, *The Religion Of The Tempasuk Dusuns Of North Borneo*, there is an inscription, which is often left out of the various digital copies in circulation.

To DIN BIN BRAHIM
Companion of my travels for more than thirty years, whose care of me has made this work possible.

Din however re-appears in Evans's preface to the book, which recounts the process of writing his book as one of a major 're-covery' job. The primary material was all but lost during the Japanese occupation and Evans had to re-write his manuscripts.

E is for elephant, exhumation and exile

She was, a weaver.
He was a manservant, companion,
and inheritor of his estate.
It was an escapee, angry, traumatised and unlucky. Preserved for posterity.

She went willingly.
He had 3 wives.
It stampeded, dying on the tracks in a headlong collision with a train.

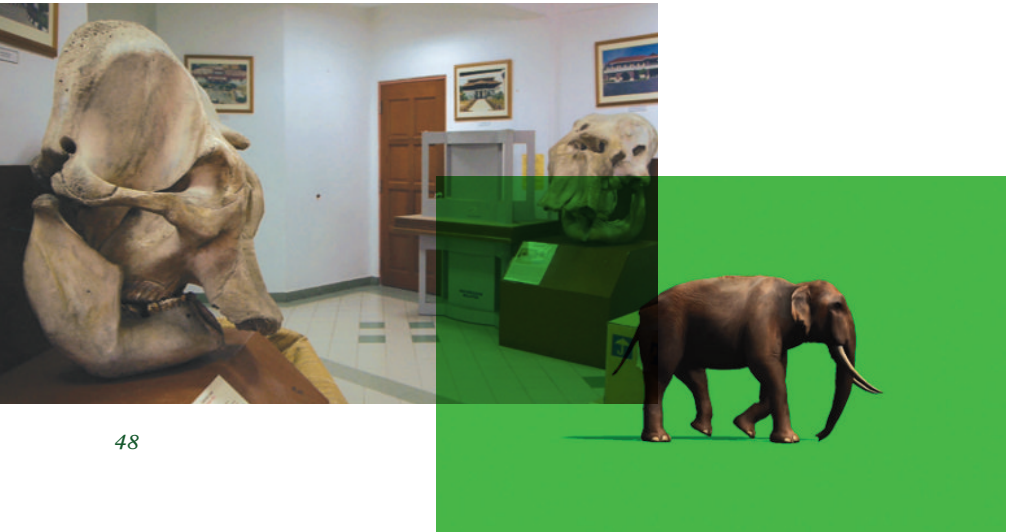
She died of double pneumonia and was buried in Woking cemetery. We looked for her gravestone, but could not find it. Deed allotment No.189, 343, somewhere between a section called the M1 and another section called the Zoroastrian. She was buried with full Muslim rites; her funeral was arranged by the London Necropolis Company.

He had a lover. He was his cook, bought newspapers home for him everyday and safeguarded his writings throughout the Japanese occupation. He accompanied him back to England and lived with him in a small Norfolk village. The same village my aunt lived on a house boat in. Din was his name. Would it bring him shame to name in retrospect the relationship he had, that the archives speak about through acts of silence, and omittances. What are the signs that we are reading? On death, Din inherited half of his employer's estate. There seems no record of what happened next.

It was de-skinned, boned, preserved and put on display.

Her name was Halimah Binti Abdullah, she was an expert weaver. She survived for almost a year living in a space at the back of the Malay pavilion animating the displays, providing entertainment for the visitors, and weaving baskets… although I prefer to think of them as traps.

We could not find her grave, but did find that of Abdul Rahman Andak – who was exiled to the UK from Johor on a salary of a £1000 [early 1900s]. He too was originally from Singapore.



F is for fidelity, high fidelity

The technological development in sound recordings in the 1940s made a newer, cleaner sound, with minimal noise and distortion, reproducing a closer semblance and illusion of reality.

'After about 12 months, I could converse tolerably well in the Malayan language. The conversation of my friends no longer appeared a chattering jargon, tiresome to listen to. The prominent expressions first impressed themselves on the memory; then by degrees, a soft flowing language issued out of the apparent chaos of words. With the possession of the language of the country, the people no longer passed and repassed as groups of strange folks, in coloured cotton prints of grotesque costume. Our recognitions now were frequent, and our conversations friendly. The Malay – the bloodthirsty, revengeful, perfidious Malay – had subsided into a good humoured, respectful, unsophisticated, little copper-coloured man, with a scanty light dress upon him. With such men who could not be good friends? When out on excursions, hot, knocked up, gasping for breath, melting with the fierce noonday sun, who would not climb the tall coconut, and bring down the sweetest of the tone? Or when this was not to be had, who would not search the pineapple garden to bring forth the most luscious fruit, redundant with juicy nectar? Or if this was also wanting, who would not draw the grateful niris from the pendant attap plant? This was the Malay man in his own home – in the country of his birth, family, and affections.'[16]

G is for green which replaces blue and Gigi Guntor

'An Amateur Ethnologist, Ivor Evans took up his post as a junior civil servant of the British North Borneo Company in 1910. This was his chance to study 'savage' culture at first hand. He noted with interest that archaeologists in neighbouring Sarawak had already unearthed ancient stone implements, and he hoped to pioneer the discovery of such treasure in British North Borneo.

Armed with the trusty catalogue of the Scottish Museum of Antiquities, Evans set off to make enquiries about the local villagers. To his surprise, he found that they recognised some of the illustrations in his catalogue, stabbing excited fingers at the smooth, palm sized stones labelled as adze-heads. These, the villagers informed him with straight-faced authority, were not adze-heads at all, but *gigi guntor*, or thunder teeth. To be precise, they were thunderbolts, charmed objects that could be found among the roots of coconut palms, which had been struck by lightening.

Evans, who was not about to go digging for thunderbolts beneath coconut trees, set off to get a second opinion.'[17]

I is for index, which implies order and meaning

The supporting cast in the film, *Lubalang Daik*, directed by Jamil Sulong, 1962

Anchor Beer cast iron bottle opener, 1940s–1970s

Courvoisier cast iron bottle opener. 1940s–1970s

Nordin Ahmad (middle) and supporting cast in a scene from a film, 1960s

Cast iron wok, 1970s

Cast ornament, unkown date

J is for journey, against time and through space

IV. AN EXPEDITION:

Planning The Start

B: Ali, bila tetap gamak kita nak bejalang esok?
B: Ali, what time are we starting to-morrow?
B: Ali, bila tetap gemak kita hendak berjalan esok?

A: Kawang ikuk bila-bila pung.
A: Whenever you like.
A: Kawan ikut bila-bila pun.

B: 'dah, kalu begitu gak, gelap esok.
B: All right then, crack o' dawn to-morrow.
B: Sudah, kalau bagitu, gelap esok.

A: 'dah apa-la, 'tapi takuk 'dak tekejuk, 'tu-la. Dang jenera gak, 'dak tahu-la.
A: All right. The only thing is I'm afraid I shan't wake up. If I once go fast asleep, there's no knowing.
A: Tidak apa-lah, tetapi takut tidak terkejut, itu-lah. Dan jendera tidak tahu-lah.

B: Amor, ayang mu bukang ada? Buleh dengar kukok.
B: Well, you've got some fowls, haven't you? Their crowing'll wake you.
B: Ambohi, ayam mu bukan ada? Buleh dengar kukok.

A: Hey, ayang 'dak buleh bechara, kadang sepuloh kali semalamang pung bekukok. Kalu murai buleh jugak bechaya, 'tapi bunyi pulak aluh sangat.
A: You can't go by the fowls. Sometime they crow ten times a night. You can trust the Robbins, but they don't sing loud enough.
A: Hey, ayam tidak buleh bechara. Kadang sa-puloh kali samalaman pun berkukok. Kalau murai buleh juga perchaya tetapi bunyi pula halus sangat.

B: Ho'r, kalu begitu gak, mari kita tidor semegek-la. Orang pukul geduk 'tu, kita jaga-la.
B: Well, lets go and sleep at the mosque then. We shall wake with the drum.
B: Ho'r, kalau bagitu, mari kita tidur mesjid-lah. Orang pukul gedok itu kita jaga-lah.

On The Way

B: Ali, mu tengok ‘dak kapal terbang?
B: Have you ever seen one of these aeroplanes, Ali?
B: Ali, mu tengok tidak kapal terbang?

A: ‘dak rajing sekali lagi.
A: Never in my life.
A: Tidak rajin sa-kali lagi.

A: ‘gewana, mu bechaya-ka tidak orang ‘dok kata ada ‘tu?
A: Do you believe what people say, that there are such things?
A: Bagimana, mu perchaya-kah tidak orang dudok kata ada itu?

B: Tetu-la ada.
B: Oh, there must be.
B: Tentu-lah ada.

A: Hey, aku s’orang tadak arah nak kata. Nak bechaya kabar ‘tu pelek sangat, terbang mega burong, ta’amboh bechaya orang-orang kata belaka.
A: Well, I don’t know what to say myself. It’s an extraordinary thing to believe, flying like a bird; but when everybody says they do fly, it’s hard not to believe.
A: Hey, aku sa-orang tiada arah hendak kata. Hendak pershaya khabar itu pelek sangal, terbang (seperti) burong, tidak emboh perchaya orang-orang kata belaka.

B: Kabar ‘tu begitu-la, ada sayap, ada ekor, gamak tiru burong-la.
B: That’s what they say, wings and tail, just like a bird.
B: Khabar itu bagitu-lah, ada sayap, ada ekur, gamak tiru burong-lah.

A: Allah, pandai sunggoh nya chari ketiar ‘tu machang-machang: tidak begitu, begitu. Berapa tinggi terbang itu?
A: People can devise almost anything these days. First this, then that. How high can they fly?
A: Allah, pandai sunggoh dia chari akhtiar itu macham-macham: tidak bagitu, bagitu. Berapa tinggi terbang itu?

B: Orang kata sayuk.
B: Out of sight, they say.
B: Orang kata sayup.

Possibly it’s a bit late to study these dialects. The vernacular schools teach a ‘standard Malay’ to the kampong children and the vernacular press does much the same thing for their parents. Possibly it never was worthwhile studying dialects of the Malay at all. In 1895 Clifford and Swettenham wrote: ‘the local dialects of colloquial Malay form a subject of minor importance and consist more in slight differences of pronunciation than in the variety of words employed.’
C. C Brown, 1935[18]

K is for knowledge, distributed

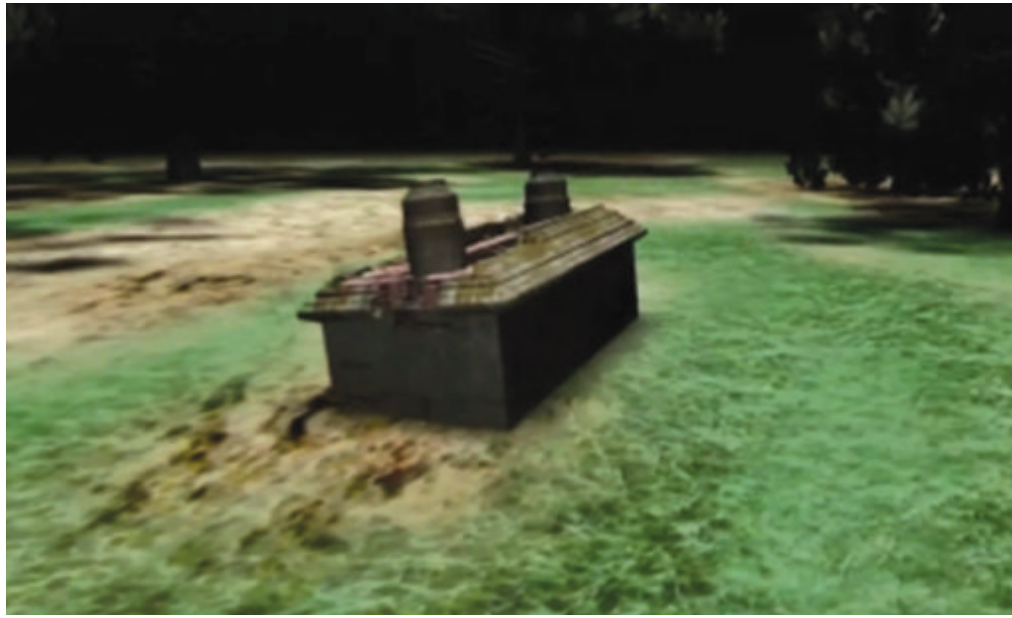
Distributed knowledge is a term used in multi-agent system research that refers to all the knowledge that a community of agents possesses and might apply in solving a problem.

Camouflage: men of the Gurkha Rifles being instructed in the use of camouflage in Malaysian jungle, October 1941, Palmer LT

L is for local (local informant), location and loss

'Oamut was a true Malay; and as I was more in contact with him than with any other persons for a whole year, I will describe him as well as I am able. At the time, I may say, I lived entirely amongst the Malays, seldom seeing Europeans. My conversation was in Malay, and current events were discussed in that language.

Oamut might stand about five feet four inches. He dressed in the usual manner of Malays viz, in the *sarong* (plaid), *saluar* (trousers), and *baju* (coat). On his head he wore a *bugis* handkerchief; and on his feet he wore sandals. By his side was a Kris, with which he never parted for a moment. At a distance he might have been taken for a Scottish highlander; when near, his copper-coloured skin, black twinkling eyes, Mongolian physiognomy, proved that he was Malay. He was independent in his tone, but respectful in his manners; and during my long intercourse with him, he neither betrayed a tincture of low breeding, nor a sign of loose and improper thoughts. Indeed his sense was delicate and keen; his ideas had a tone of high standard. He was mindful of money for any other object than what was necessary to maintain himself and family. He gradually commanded my friendship. I felt I could not but respect him. His conversation was intelligent on the affairs of the surrounding states; his information was deep in the characteristics of his own race; and his description of past and passing events interesting and instructive. Yet he



could neither read nor write – a defect he bewailed with much sorrow.

Oamut was a wild young man, and wanted to see the world; so in a moment of unguardedness, he was caught in the meshes of an enlisting sergeant of the Ceylon Rifle Corps. Dosed with narcotics, and before seeing either father or mother, he was carried on board a ship bound for a long foreign service… Oamut was borne off; and he landed safely in Ceylon, was drilled and stiffened into the shape of a British soldier. He was also sent to school but could never learn the difference between a and b; he however progressed so far in English as to speak it, parrot like; but what he said was better understood by himself than by his white friends.

While in Ceylon he assisted in the reduction of the hill tribes; and on one occasion stuck by his wounded captain for 3 days. He concealed him in the jungle, and bore him out to safety. This gave Oamut a step; but he was bodo (unlearned), so could not be made a sergeant. He served for 27 years, after which he yearned to return to his native land. He got his discharge without pension (the reason of this I could never satisfactorily learn).

So he returned penniless to Pulo Pinang to find father and mother, sisters and brothers, gone! The very posts of his father's house had rotted away.'[19]

The exhumation and repatriation of Ngah Ibrahim's remains from Singapore to Matang, Perak (2006). Ngah Ibrahim was exiled to the Seychelles by the British in 1877 for his perceived role in the assassination of J.W.W Birch, Perak's first British Resident. He later moved to Singapore, where he died, having never returned to his homeland.

M is for mute, martyr and Matang

'The objects' *performance* emerges when they are utilised in exhibitions; curators provide their *lines* in the form of labels and text panels. When they are back in the museum store, they are *resting*, like actors between jobs. We may question these objects' roles, their relationships to the stories they tell during a *performance*, and how their role in a museum can be reconciled with their previous role in *real life* as opposed to *stage life*.'[20]

P is for proof, precision and power









Keris Berdiri, various internet sources

R is for repatriation, repetition and refuse

On The Wild Tribes Of The Interior Of The Malay Peninsular, Bourien P. 1863

Glimpses Of Life In Malayan Lands, Thomson T. 1864/1984

The Malay Archipelago: The Land Of The Orang-Utan And The Bird Of Paradise, Wallace A.R. 1869

Perak And The Malays: Sarong And Kris, McNair J.F.A. 1878

Dialects Of The Melanesian Tribes In The Malay Peninsula, Miklucho-Maclay N. 1878

The Chersonese With Gilding Off, Innes E. 1885

Malay Sketches, Swettenham F. 1895

In Court And Kampong: Being Tales And Sketches Of Native Life In The Malay Peninsula, Clifford H.C. 1897

Camping And Tramping In Malaya, Rathborne A.B. 1898

Malay Magic, Skeat W.W. 1900

Pagan Races Of The Malay Peninsula, Skeat & Blagden. 1906

My Friends The Savages: Among The Sakais In The Malay Peninsula, Cerutti G.B. 1908

An Illustrated Guide To The Federated Malay States, Harrison & Barnard. 1910

The Aboriginal Races, Winstedt R.O. 1922

Papers On Malay Subjects, Life And Customs, Wilkinson R.J. 1925

Six Years In The Malayan Jungle, Wells C. 1925

A Jungle Wallah At Large, Charles H. 1927 (re-published as Romance and Research in Borneo)

Malay Beliefs, Evans I.H.N. 1927

The Soul Of Malaya, Falconnier H. 1931

The Confessions Of A Planter In Malaya: A Chronicle Of Life And Adventure In The Jungle, Ainsworth L. 1933

Fasciculi Malayeneses, Robinson & Nelson. 1957

S is for sabotage, stability and stores

Along, against, within, and through, we are all inextricably linked to the archive and its demands.

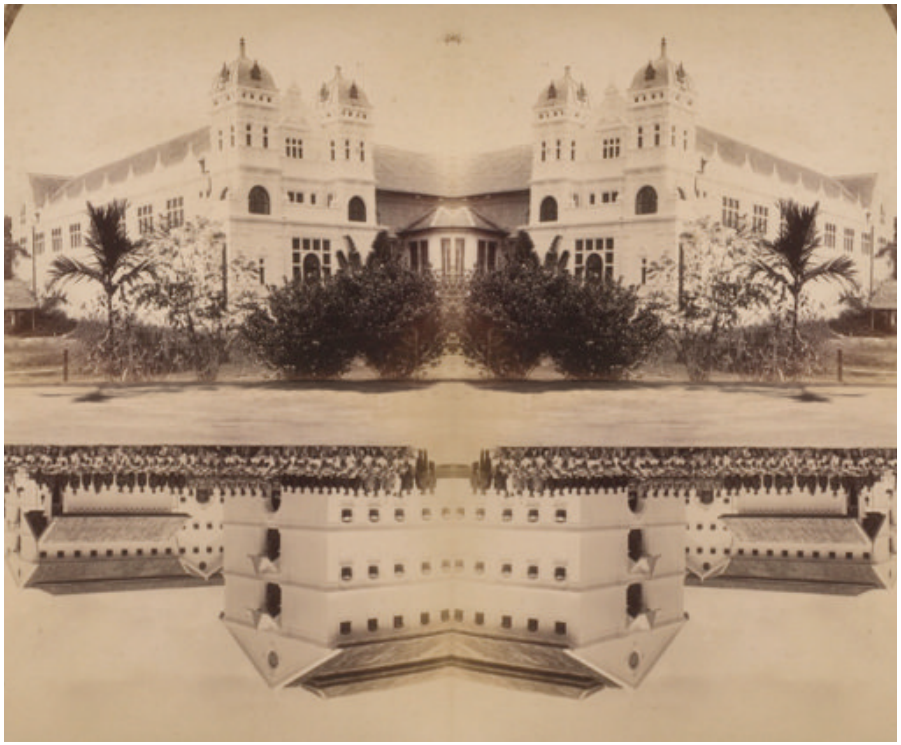
Not a place or location but a methodology.

Seeking stability, creating crisis, suspending time.

Can we choose who we swim downstream of?

Bathing downstream of a contaminant is never a good idea. But the opposite for an enlightened one.

T is for technology, taxonomy and tautology



In Taiping there are over 40 firsts: the first hill resort for experimental plantations and cooler leisure time; the first swimming pool nestled in amongst the hills; the first clock tower to bring time into order.

The first jail and the first museum were developed 4 years apart, sandwiched in between the first turf club and the first hospital. Sited directly across the road from each other, one rehabilitates minds and the other bodies.

Taiping Prison is one of the earliest permanent penitentiary institutions in the Federated Malay States. It was built in 1879 to quell further unrest in the wake of the Larut Wars. This is a few years after the murder of J.W.W. Birch, but it was successful in suppressing further large-scale warfare between the Chinese clans. It remains till today in the same spot.

Perak Museum was built in 1883, and opened in 1886, the museum is the oldest museum in Malaysia. There are 5,074 cultural collections, 523 nature collections and 2,877 miscellaneous items. Its Nature Gallery houses 100-year-old animal species and some of its original dioramas are still on display.

V is for voice, the ones that weren't heard

Green Screen

Martin Constable & Erika Tan

24 Jul, 2013 at 5:01 AM GMT +1:00

'erika tan' wrote:

Hi Martin, great! Thanks for this!

Yes, please do come on the 21st of August.
In the meantime, I wonder if you have anything to say in relation to 'green screen'? It's a constant recurrent reference in my current work – primarily because I see a similarity in the technology of green screen and that of the museum, in terms of their dis-locational function. I have also found it fascinating that although green screen does have a pantone, it's often quite a divergent range of green that is in use – the similarities between 'tropical green' and 'green screen' is something I've found also of interest... I only bring this up because I know you have been doing work around digital painting, colour etc and wonder if there was anything that came to mind in relation to this? Best, Erika

24 Jul, 2013 at 05:08 AM

From: 'Martin Constable (Asst Prof)'

Hi Erika

I like the idea of linking green screen with the museum. Neat.

Some disparate observations:
Like any color, green is most strong (i.e. at greatest saturation) when it is lit in its intensity sweet spot. If it is too dark or too light, the green will suffer (i.e. will be less saturated and seemingly less green).

A green screen must also be lit very evenly with no light hot spots or shadows.

The foreground object (FG) (i.e. the subject) must be lit separately to the screen.

The screen should not cast too much of its reflected green light onto the FG. such light is called spill. Some spill is inevitable, but it should be kept to a minimum.

The prescribed green screen green corresponds to the green as it would appear in the green channel of the RGB color space.

A home made green screen is called a ghetto green screen.

You mention green screen and tropical green. It is notable that a FG object must not be of the same color as the screen. For this reason, jungles are shot against blue screen.

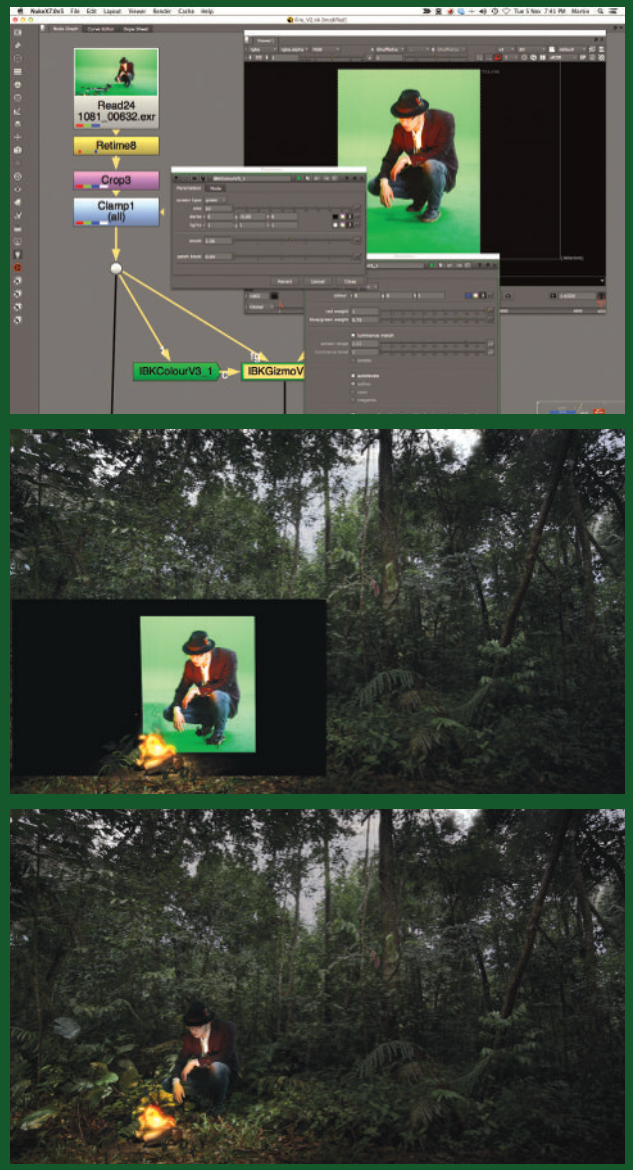
The first green screen ever made was for the film Bed-knobs and Broomsticks.

For a similar reason FG objects that reflect are bad news. It would be nearly impossible to green screen a mirror as it would reflect too much green.

The act of isolating a FG from the screen is called pulling a key. A pull is usually more than just a simple isolating of the green channel (i.e. a channel operation). It operates in a 3D space in a manner that is additive and subtractive. Imagine a room as all your colors, and a balloon as the sub section of the greens that you want.

A keyer is amongst the most complex pieces of software that a compositor is likely to use.

I leave you to join the dots on all this. Martin.



Grieve Perspective, still from *Seeking Immortality Through the Reverence of Our Ancestors*, 2013, before and after green screen

Re/Collections From The Archives

The Phantom Expedition

Janice Loo

Thu, Jun 24, 2010 at 4:14 PM
Hi Mustafa,

Sorry for the delay, was catching up with work left undone because of my trip. Here's what I intend to do with the accounts of the collecting trips made by the Raffles Museum, the Raffles Museum in conjunction with other museums, and some personalities who later went to work for the Raffles Museum (It is all quite messy actually because some appear to be private collecting trips, and sometimes trips undertaken by other F.M.S museums actually brought along non-European collectors who were working for the Raffles Museum.) I'll have to look at Fiona's summaries of the Annual Reports later on to gauge the number and scale of collecting trips to straighten this out.

Anyway, I propose to write a somewhat personal response piece about my encounter with these hitherto neglected accounts of collecting trips that offer information on the museum's 'production process'. The museum's scientific publications and exhibitions represent the final stage of its work, the successful disciplining of an otherwise chaotic mess of anthropomorphic talking beasts and plant spirits – the natural world as comprehended through Malay animism and magic. However, the impression of powerful order in the final product – extensive collections which spawn exhibitions, brochures, numerous scientific lists and studies of animals and plants, belies the reality of the negotiation that has taken place, the fact that such order is not a factor of nature but created by the deliberate negation of that which is illogical, that which does not conform.

It is by analysing these expedition accounts that detail the trials and tribulations of going into the wild, claiming and collecting its components (sometimes even naming it after the museum staff that 'discovered' it; some plants that were named after Dr. Hanitsch had 'Hanitschii' in their latin names), bringing it back to the museum, to civilisation, that enables us to tap into the psyche of those pioneers of the Malayan museum scene – characters like H.N. Ridley, H.C. Robinson, C. Boden Kloss, J.C. Moulton, R. Hanitsch, and so on. Through their personal narratives (though most times they endeavour to write more 'scientifically', minimising references to their own emotions and experiences), the reader can get a sense of how they imagined the Malayan landscape (on some occasions their expectations were disappointed), struggled with the terrain and climate, and most significant of all, how they handled their relationships with their non-European colleagues (native collectors, guides and coolies) who very often were much more knowledgeable and adept at the task at hand than they were. Encounters with native 'superstition' and magic were fairly plentiful, these were regarded with a mix of amusement and benign paternalism, but never with wonder, fear or awe. Calm rationality prevails in their recordings of such episodes and in the choice of words used (even though ironically they interrupt the foregoing narrative composed largely of flora and fauna observations), to the extent that the sense of the inexplicable, the sublime, is stripped off these rituals.That is the gist!

Interestingly, the practice of writing

these kinds of expedition journals that are more 'personal' and included ethnographic notes kind of tapered off in the mid-1920s, in fact, there are no accounts of this sort in the Bulletin of the Raffles Museum and Library (first published in 1926) and for some reason the Journal of the Federated Malay States Museums also followed this trend. Either there were less expeditions or it seemed that the participants figured that pure scientific writing was the way to go. Also, it seems that nobody has done a study of these expedition accounts, the Asian Civilisation Museum's exhibition on Hunters and Collectors focused only on collectors who were explorers, philanthropists, missionaries – none of them museum staff. And there hasn't been a study on the relationship between the European museum staff and the non-European participants on these collecting trips. Alternatively, I was thinking I could do an 'empire writes back' piece by coming up with an expedition report from the perspective of the natives, but that would be very tricky.

Do give me your comments!

Cheers, Janice

Sat, Jul 10, 2010 at 5:46 PM
Hey Mustafa,

I'm proposing to write the expedition journal from a female perspective, that is, there's going to be a young wife accompanying her husband on the collecting trip (her husband's going to be an anonymous friend of the museum staff, perhaps a fellow member of the Naturalist Society). As cliched as it sounds, I think it would seem more acceptable and believable for a woman to express emotions of wonder, fear and doubt compared to the scientific men that we're dealing with. She would be in a sense 'free' to support their endeavors, remark on the encounters with natives (like 'Oh those poor dirty brown children!') and enact all the drama one can reasonably expect from a woman, which can be a source of humour and respite from what would otherwise be a normal run-of-the-mill expedition account if written from a male perspective. But the more important thing is that she would embody vulnerability, she can express fear and apprehension when confronted with the unexplained mysteries of ritual and magic, she could be the voice of doubt wanting to believe in the self-confidence of the men and what their expedition stood for, and yet she is undeniably spooked by what she has witnessed despite the assurances of her fellow travelers. It's ideally going to be a blend of Louis Couperus' The Hidden Force (the Dutch novel permeated with references to black magic but the readers never really know what is the source of this 'hidden force' that plagues the protagonist and his family), the stack of expedition accounts that I have, and travel accounts by women (like Insulinde and the Golden Khersonese).

Cheers, Janice

Sun, Jul 11, 2010 at 11:33 AM
Hi Janice.

I think this is a fascinating proposition. Especially the gendered gaze that you intend to develop. My only concern is: would this mean that you will be drawing from sources other than the expedition journals? I ask this because, the intention (as I saw it) has always been to 'remain true to the sources', i.e. Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society journal entries. Posing a fascinating problem to scientific modes of historical writing which have ill-tolerated that odd historical trace in the archive which refuses to fit into the measured approach that is history. If it is indeed possible to develop a gendered narrative from the existing JMBRAS expedition reports, then you should develop it by all means… I have a feeling it is building up into a wonderful piece.

Best, Mustafa

Mon, Jul 12, 2010 at 8:31
Hey Mustafa,

I assure you that I won't be quoting from sources other than the expedition journals, I'm just consulting travel accounts by female writers to get a sense of their writing style and temperament. The bulk of my fake expedition account will be based on excerpts from the expedition journals I have, I may even lift chunks of text directly from the original sources and mix them together. I guess the problem of developing a gendered narrative from existing expedition reports is the fact that women had no part in the collecting trips, so in the absence of a female voice in the Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society (JSBRAS) reports (and in the entire museum project), the female travel accounts therefore serve as the lens through which I can gauge how a woman might have behaved if one had indeed been present on such a trip. How the men think, feel and behave are all laid down in the JSBRAS and it's difficult to imagine them in a different way without contradicting what's in the sources. I've attached some of the excerpts that I've picked out so you can get an idea of what I'm putting into the fake report.

Janice

Tue, Jul 13, 2010 at 9:40 AM
Hi Janice.

I read through the extracts and I have sense of what you are thinking about. I think it is just fine. However, do keep a keen eye out and refrain from making the expedition too chaotic. Unless the chaos is part of the expedition experience? Things can always go terribly wrong in the Malayan jungles. :)

Mustafa

Excerpts / following pages:
p. 76 R. Hanitsch[1], C. Moulton[2]
p. 77 R. Hanitsch[3], C. Moulton[4]

I heard that I was the first European who had visited Kiou for four or five years, but it is apparently more than that, as two men showed me certificates from Dr. G. D. Haviland, dated April 24th, 1892, which stated that the bearers had acted as his guides during his ascent of Kina Balu in March 1892. Dr. Haviland, called 'Tuan Bunga' by the natives, seems to have been the last European here, and before him Mr. John Whitehead in 1887, who is remembered as 'Tuan Burong.' Malagup, the Dusun Chief, here came to me soon after our arrival, saying:

M. 'Tabek, Tuan, itu orang coolie mau satu ayam.'

R. H. "Apa? Itu orang coolie samoa samoa mau satu ayam?"

M. 'Tabek, Tuan, satu ayam besar.'

R. H. "Satu ayam besar? Apa macham ayam besar?"

M. 'Tabek, Tuan, satu kerbau.'

The men had apparently enjoyed the bullock I had given them two days before, but I am afraid my answer to Malagup did not encourage similar requests. Still the men seemed to be bent on pleasure, for they asked me for a holiday the next day, which happened to be a Sunday. To this I agreed. In the morning the weather had been dry, except for a few minutes of drizzling rain. But we had rain all afternoon till late into the night. Aneroid at 3.45 p.m. 2400'; thermometer 76° F.

(I counted 30 to 40) in which Muruts or Tabuns had been buried. Some of the jars were said to be very old and worth from two to three hundred dollars if they had not been broken. I had one (the least broken) removed and succeeded in bringing it safely to Kuching, and it is now in the Sarawak Museum. Knowing how particular natives are about safe-guarding their burial-grounds, as of course is only natural, I was most careful to inquire if they objected to my removing the jar; they assured me that it did'nt matter in the least, that nobody was buried there now and had not been within the memory of man, that these broken jars were of no use to anyone and that if I was anxious to take the remains of one, nobody could possibly object. So I took it, arriving in due course at Limbang with the jar and party safe and sound. Then followed an unpleasant 10 days of malaria before reaching Kuching at the end of April. This year I am warned against taking any more jars, as that, according to my Limbang friends, was the obvious cause of my fever and such was only to be expected as a reminder from the offended spirits!

Life amongst the Natives. We found the Dusuns very good-natured and harmless people, and quite honest until the last day in Panjut when our kerosine oil disappeared for a few hours and some other trifling things for ever. They were certainly somewhat lazy in the morning, and there was generally a great deal of grumbling before they took up their loads, but when once started, they left little to be desired, and showed themselves splendid carriers especially on hilly ground. Very annoying was their intense curiosity: when we arrived at a village, not only our carriers and the people of the house with their immediate friends, but all the village came and stood there, several rows deep, around us. We could not change our socks or any other part of our dress without themselves and their women and children taking stock of every movement and every article. It was the same when the cook prepared my meals or when I partook of the same, when I wrote my notes or bottled specimens, when I undressed at night-time and disappeared behind the mosquito-curtain, everything formed food for their admiration and amazement. Sometimes when I sat perfectly still without doing anything, their attention relaxed, but my slightest movement had the effect of the curtain rising at the Pantomine, the eyes and open mouths of all present were directed to one

A little way above the Batu Tarikan, (the rock mentioned before) the stream enters a high limestone cliff and disappears altogether into the bowels of Mt. Molu; a wide archway, but very low, only 4 ft. above the water's edge at the highest point, lets one into a spacious hall; four of us paddled in, leaving one man outside with a cut stick and a whistle, so that he could let us know if the water was rising. According to the natives the water has a way of rising very suddenly for no apparent cause, and for that reason most natives are afraid of going in there; however one must not believe them too implicitly, as in Sarawak, at any rate, they are usually most accommodating to the European traveller; if they see he wants to do something never done by white men before, they are quite ready to tell you the story of one who never dared to do this before, and at the same time keep quiet about the hundred and one who have done it. Once inside this kind of hall or ante-room a small dark door-way barely five foot square shows us the only way into mysteries of the interior; through this we push our boat, shoving against the slimy walls of the cavern with our hands. This soon

*Sir Spenser St. John did the trip twice, taking 8 days on the first occasion from Brunei and 5 days on the second from the Kuala Madalam.

Fishy Histories

Janice Loo

15 May 2013 18:13:11 GMT+01:00
Dear Erika,

I'm very glad to know that *Camping And Tramping* is spinning off into something else. I am not sure how I could revisit or extend my earlier contribution on the conspicuous absence of women from these scientific expeditions as my fledgling interest in women and their role in the British empire has spun off into something else altogether since *Camping And Tramping*.

More specifically, I'm looking at more 'intimate' forms of knowledge, i.e. texts that map the domestic sphere, and how the wider politics of race, gender, coloniser / colonised are reproduced on the scale of the household. I consider cookery texts, within the larger corpus of household management manuals etc. as part of the 'cultural technologies of rule' for often they are instruments that enabled the expatriate housewife, the *memsahib*, to construct a semblance of home away (significant given the prevailing notion that women were a 'civilising' force for their presence was a bulwark against the degenerative, immoral influences of the East – e.g. men taking native concubines).

Eating is central to survival. By extension, cookery texts that codified a repertoire of 'tried-and-tested' recipes suitable for European consumption in the tropics thus sustained the health of the colonial body. The recipe book, which often contained tips on household management, marketing, lists of Malay vocabulary and phrases, provided the newly-arrived wife with guidance on her supervisory role in managing a team of servants – Chinese cook, Malay syce etc. Yet, cookery texts are prescriptive and concoct a vision of how things ought to be. Reality often proves otherwise as *memsahib* – not to mention *Tuan* and the children too – are very much 'at the mercy' of their servants. Perhaps like how the men of science were dependent on their native guides.

The taxonomic impulse is also replicated in cookery texts, in the way recipes are ordered along ethnic lines, in the systematic layout of ingredients, in the deconstruction of local foods into nutritional values. In this way, I see cookery texts, domestic science as a sort of 'flipside', or something running parallel to the male-dominated sphere of museum – collecting.

Aside from this, I also want to consider how the writing of cookbooks, domestic science and the feminine ideal 'championed' by European women are then 'appropriated' by Asiatic women who as a result, attain some form of recognition for their culinary skills – perhaps on a level comparable to those they emulated (whether purposefully or otherwise).

These are just possibilities that I'm still exploring. Perhaps I could contribute something both 'scientific' and with a nutritional concern… The Raffles Museum did have an exhibition of food fishes before in the 1940s… Certainly the collecting of natural specimens was not exclusively concerned with knowledge for its own sake but also related to economic concerns, of developing industry and a market, which is in turn related to consumption…

Yours sincerely, Janice

5 June 2013 16:27:16 GMT+01:00
Hi Erika,

Re: Yams. I could only find 1 cookbook recipe, 'King Yam Cake'. Unfortunately, yams don't seem to have received much attention in the newspapers, except maybe in the late 1930s – mid-1940s as part of the wartime 'Grow Your Own Vegetables' campaign. No doubt yam and other tubers like tapioca and sago, were staple foods of indigenous tribes though.

Hmm… there are discrepancies between native and colonial taxonomies when it came to the yam (I'm sure other plants suffered similar fates), where yam = ubi nasi but not all ubi = yam (e.g. ubi kayu is tapioca, ubi kentang is potato, to the native, all tubers are ubi). Is there a big-enough point to be made here? What about other produce on display at the 1922 exhibition? If I remember correctly, there might have been cooking demonstrations as well… but those might have been conducted to demonstrate use of newfangled kitchen utensils rather than to showcase the use of the produce…

Maybe some pineapples? There seems to be a long-running pineapple campaign beginning in 1927 spearheaded by the Malayan Information Agency; apparently even a film on pineapples in 1955. Or maybe the tapioca, which had at least been named as a potential commercial crop… But, I must admit, there's just something about yams lah, maybe because they seem so humble, somehow less 'emblematic' of the tropics compared to the over-exposed pineapple…and thus an unexpected choice for exhibition, haha! Let you know again if I come up with anything else.

Cheers, J

27 August 2013 19:00:33 GMT+01:00
Hi Erika,

…coming back to *Camping And Tramping*, I think, throughout, none of us really knew what we were looking at, scrabbling in the dark, or perhaps we felt Mustafa had a bigger picture in mind. Anyway, I believe we only had a sense of what all that research amounted to on the opening day itself, when we saw it in material terms.

Somehow, in the course of digging in the archives, an informal 'division of labour' developed where Fiona looked into the annual reports (where the biographies and personalities emerged), myself in the expeditions, Willetts and Polunin for Eddie and Christina respectively.

If I remember correctly, the stuff we wrote for the catalogue were intended to be 'bibliographic essays', that we wrote with the intention to weave in as many sources to expose the archives and its content as much as possible. And while researching, certainly the themes of fact/fiction, science/superstition, emerged as a pattern, and this translated into the writing itself, where they sought to question those dichotomies.

I think women, recipes, cookbooks, remain… tangentially-related to the museum. The voices of women are found elsewhere, though no less engaged in advancing the accumulation of knowledge and colonial authority.

For example, this quote taken from the *Y.W.C.A. International Cookery Book of Malaya* (1935):

'Sir Frank Swettenham, in his book British Malaya, first published in 1906, tells us that a Malay man rarely mentions food; being reserved and polite he resents curiosity on the part of strangers, particu-

larly on the subject of the women of his household. At a meeting of anthropologists the remark was recently made that it is often far more easy for a woman to get into touch with all those interesting details of the household, in which may be included birth, marriage and death, and their attendant mysteries, than for a man. Perhaps one day some lady living in Malaya will give her time and patience to research in Malayan cookery, and if she has a flair for cooking herself, be able to write down the information in those measures and method – descriptions that we know as recipes.'

With regard to recipes, in an earlier e-mail you asked about the influence of local produce in cooking instructions, I think, from very early on local dishes and ingredients were adopted into the colonial diet, out of practical necessity and the fact that the household relied on the cook to do the marketing, and the cook thus had a hand in determining what was consumed. And as a particular ingredient became accepted and normalised within the colonial diet, it surrendered its Other-ness and perhaps even became associated with that culture, even as it retained the native name, e.g. *ikan merah*.

More interestingly, the *ikan merah*, due to its popularity amongst the European community, became at once a sort of 'high status' food item and something that pointed to colonial fear, ignorance, because they did not venture to consume (very many) others. I think this particular quote sums it up pretty much, the connection between consumption, knowledge and power, overlapping with that line of separation between private/public, outside/inside (the home):

'Only those whose weekends are spent amid the tangles of the jungle have learned to appreciate the beauties of the animal world, while many who go to fisheries in junks and other craft know more of the secrets of the deep than persons who grumble over *ikan merah* served by callous cooks.'[5]

Will update you again by Friday, I'll attempt something with *ikan merah*, and/or yams…

Cheers, J

At the dinner table: Fish On The Menu Need Not Be Ikan Merah

Mary Heathcott

Not only fishermen can tell fishy stories. Housewives can tell them too.

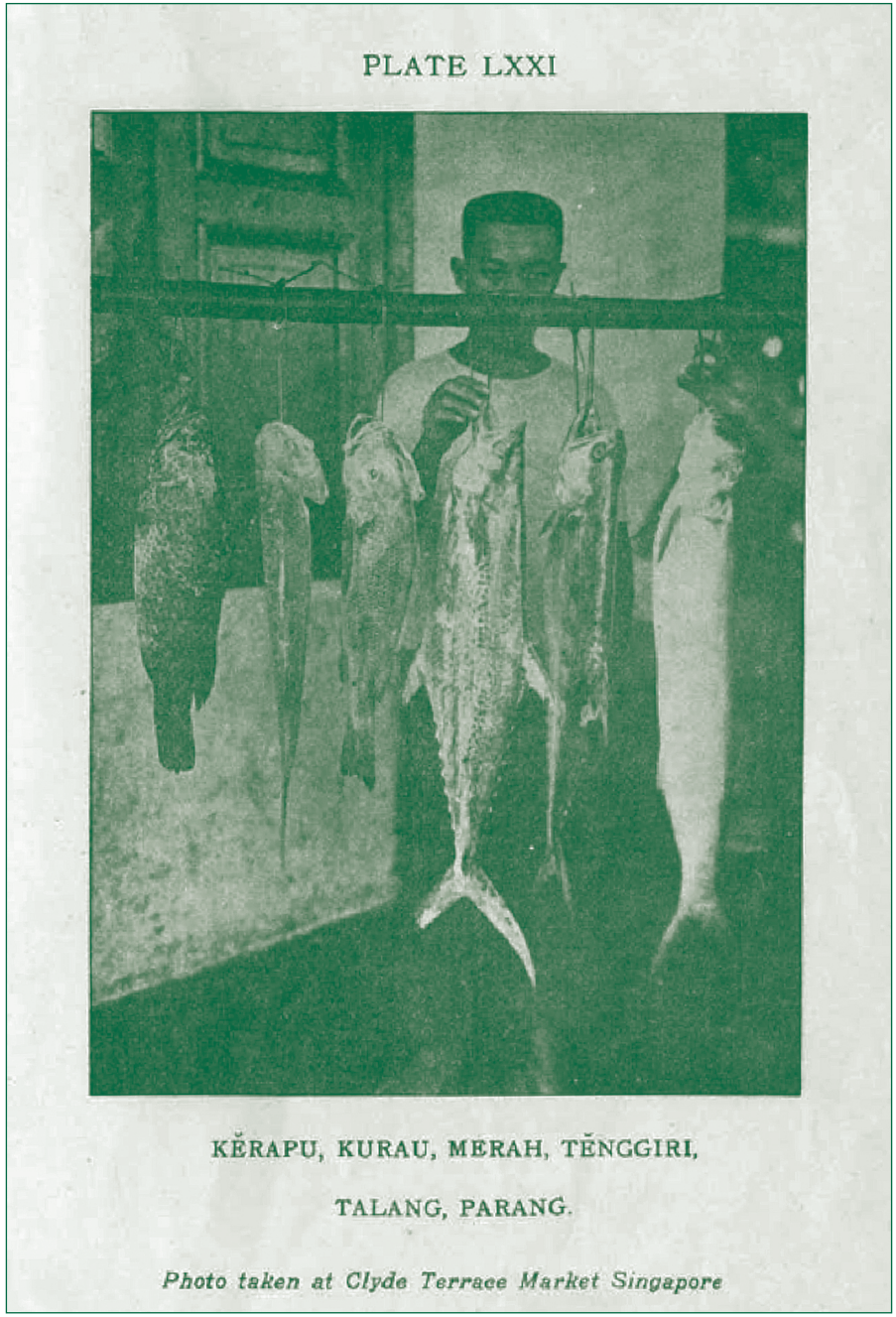
When you first arrive in Singapore, if you are a house-wife that is, and start your marketing, you learn of ikan merah.

It appears that this is the fish here. It sounds exotic. It is only afterwards that you are a little dashed to find ikan means fish, and that it's a red fish, and is called, unpretentiously, red fish.

Later, when you are less over whelmed by the fish market, its odours and important cries of the fish salesmen, you observe that there are many varieties of fish other than ikan merah.

You look at them, some of them are spotted and obviously have had a high temperature when alive.

They must be eatable, you argue with yourself, or they couldn't be here, but you hesitate and the fish vendor eagerly pushes forward a nice piece of ikan merah and



you play for safety and introduce the ikan merah to your family once more.

Number Two Choice

One day perhaps you eat a little flat fish at a dinner party and you are told that it is a pomfret. Pomfret is your next buy at the fish market, and after that alternates with old friend ikan merah on the home menu. Not that you don't have your bold moments too.

I had one.

I saw a long, rather pretty blue spotted fish. I bought it and took it home. The family remarked that it was rather highly coloured, wasn't it? But so pretty I countered, and had it suggested to me that you don't buy a fish because it looks pretty.

'No Good!'

I took it into the kitchen, Ah Lee the cook-boy looked at it with some disgust.

'Fish no good,' he pronounced after deliberation.

'Do you mean the fish is bad or that you don't like this particular kind?' I asked, exasperated.

'Fish no good,' remarked Ah Lee again. 'Why you no buy ikan merah?'

'I know this fish all right,' I said fiercely. A slow unbelieving smile spread over the face of Ah Lee.

'Fish all right, mem,' suddenly said another voice. We looked towards the window and there was Buang, the syce, seriously and solemnly poking his nose into the domestic discussion.

'Fish very good, mem. I know, mem.'

'There,' I said triumphantly to the cook. 'Buang knows fish is good.'

'Very cheap fish,' threw in the cook, and shot a volley of Malay at the syce.

'Cheap or not, I want it cooked,' I said with a terrific effort to be firm'.

Ah Lee and the syce continued to talk volubly at one another, and then a third voice joined in. Amah, intent on missing nothing had turned up and was determined to put her card in. But could see without being told that she thought it was a nasty cheap fish, too, and a big joke at that.

Fish For Lunch

However, it was understood that we were to have the fish for lunch. The cook picked it up with a resigned, let-it-be-on-your-own-head air, and then I had the ground undermined beneath my feet by the family refusing to eat the fish.

'The cook knows. It's probably bad, anyway,' said the family, 'and we'll all look much sillier with fish poisoning.'

At this point anything might have happened to the fish. It might have flown though the air and hit someone in the face. But strangely enough it stayed on the kitchen table and was wrapped up again.

I turned to my only ally, still with his head stuck through the kitchen window.

'You like this fish,' I said, 'you think it all right?'

'Yes, mem very good fish.'

'Very well, Buang, you can have it.'

The fish was handed to the smiling syce, and mem retired to buy some ikan merah.

Sequel

The story, though you may be getting very tired of it, like other fishy stories, is by no means finished.

Next morning, I asked Buang how he liked the fish.

'oh, I not take it home, Mem. I give to the kebun.'

'But, why, Buang, I thought you were

In the Malayan markets the fish section is generally set apart from the other sections and is often rather distasteful to the European on account of the smell and the water which is continually being slopped about to keep the market clean. So that as often as not the cook or the syce is entrusted with the purchasing of fish and the result is that many of the varieties of fish which are to be had in Malaya never find their way to the European's table. *Malayan fish and how to cook them*. (1941). Singapore: Department of Information and Publicity.[6]

Exhibition Of Food Fishes Of Malaya

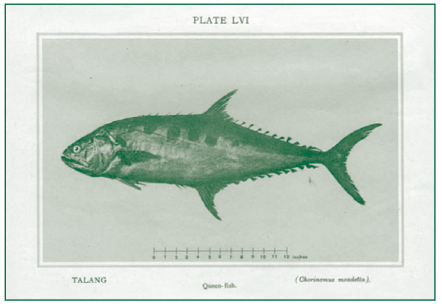
THE range of variety of fish that finds its way to most European tables in Singapore is absurdly small. Many people seem to think that the available supply is limited to ikan merah, soles, and ikan kurau.

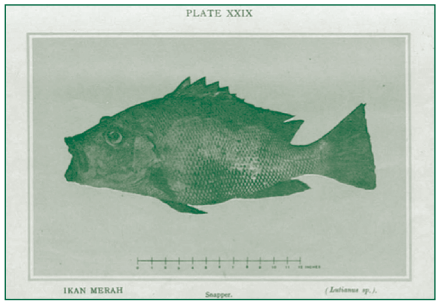
Actually the markets are always full of fish of many kinds, cheaper than the swagger merah, and a pleasant change from the ubiquitous slab of kurau. Cookie, of course, will usually blandly assert that novelties in the fish line are "tidak manis" for the cultivated European taste, but his opinion in the matter of cheap produce is biassed.

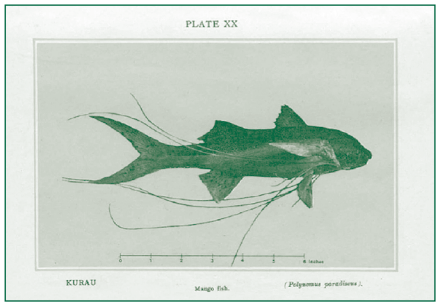
Housekeepers and others in complete or part control of a wage-earner's purse are invited to visit the Raffles Museum, where, in the fish room (up the stairs, to the left, and through the bird gallery), they will find an exhibition of the common food fishes of the Singapore markets.

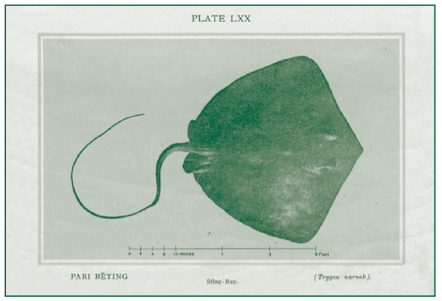
Here are prepared specimens of all the old favourites (bawal, tenggiri, lidah, etc.), and others that may be new, even to old residents of Singapore. All are good food, and on any day at least a majority of the species shown can be bought for the table in the larger markets of the city.

Brief explanatory labels include, among other items of interest, English and Malay names. Chinese visitors have the opportunity of studying in detail and comparing the imported breeds of carp, characteristic of the local pond industry.









going to eat it yourself?'

'oh, yes, mem, but I think it long time before I go home, perhaps fish go bad, so I give to kebun.'

But the story has a sequel. For yesterday. I was given a book called 'Malayan Fish and how to cook them' compiled by D.W. Le Mare, Assistant Director of Fisheries. The book has pictures and descriptions of the various edible fish to be found in Malayan waters and my pretty spotted fish is in the gallery and is described as being of 'good flavour'. So now I feel much better.

Of Great Interest

This booklet should prove much interest to long established housewives as well as those who have not been in Malaya very long.

As well as many basic recipes for the cooking and serving of fish, there are also hints on the buying of it. Each variety of fish is described in detail and the book is well illustrated with sketches and colour plates.

There is a section for sauces, stuffing and savoury batters for fish garnishes and there is another chapter devoted to Fish Smoking and instructions for building a smoke house, so that you can provide yourself with a good local kipper or 'haddie'.

Free copies of the book can be obtained from the Department of Information and Publicity. P.O. Box 705. Armed with a copy of it, housewives will find many alternatives to ikan merah with which to enliven their menus. They need have no doubt either, about the new variety of fish they want to try for they will be able to distinguish it clearly in the book and find out the best way of cooking it.[7]

Colonial Animism: Stuffed, Skinned, Pickled And Some Even Alive!

Fiona Tan

Camping And Tramping brought me face to face with the various animals which had previously gone through the hands of the colonial museum directors – and thereby, though indirectly, with their ideas about animals, shared by their peers and predecessors. The following collection reflects the specifics, and speaks not only to animal encounters, but to the interpersonal relations and politics of the time.

Elephant: Larger ears to catch rumours with:

The extracts here deal with the idea of acting on information supplied by others. From the positivist Annual Report extract (hearing from H.H. Banks), to H.H. Bank's conflicted views of native informants (Ahmat the tracker was the exception to the imagined general category of Malays who claimed all elephants had enormous tusks), to how Frank Buck's encounter with an elephant was blown out of proportion by the newspapers. The reliability of information provided by others was not easily predicted.

Orang Utan: Man and Forest, and vice versa:

The shifting of nature (in this instance, orang-utans) into museums involved a humanisation of the forest, reflected by the anthropomorphising of the animal into a relatable human or old man. What is less obvious, though, is the forestation of humans, where taxonomic links which resemble tree branches were imposed upon human types; humanity was measured through their physical relation with orang utans.

Seladang: The purpose and product of preservation:

Preservation of wildlife comes in many forms in these excerpts, from the commentary on the un-lifelike taxidermic work of a taxidermist who had never seen a live seladang, to the writings of Theodore Hubback, a big-game hunter turned conservationist. The third excerpt particularly prompts the question of the purpose of preservation, when a photographic document taken to record the hunt was 'ruined by the damp', and when the goal of preserving for display a seladang skin, alienates an entire community.

Elephant

It had long been felt that the interest of the exhibition galleries would be enhanced by the presence of an adult Malayan Elephant and in May, advantage was taken of an excellent opportunity that occurred for getting a specimen. Mr H.H. BANKS, the game-warden of Negri Sembilan, interested himself in the matter on behalf of the Museum; and when it became absolutely necessary to deal with a small herd of destructive elephants near Laba, he kept careful watch over them and owing to his admirable management the Curator, accompanied by the Taxidermist and five native assistants, was able to leave Singapore on the night of 7th May and return only ten days later with the perfectly cured skin of a cow elephant. The skin was mounted in the Museum and the result is sufficiently satisfactory to justify the belief that if the opportunity to obtain a really large bull elephant ever occurs the work could be undertaken with confidence by the present staff.[8]

Word had been sent in of a big tusker which was doing a certain amount of damage on a rubber and tapioca estate on the borders of Negri Sembilan. This elephant was supposed to carry enormous tusks (they all do according to the Malays!) and in addition was credited with being invulnerable. Pawang Gadoh, who had, from his own account, made several attempts on the animal, went one better, stating that the radiance from the beast's tusks was so great as almost to blind him!

I was very sceptical about this animal; but a plaintive telegram from the Chinese owner saying:

'PLEASE COME SHOOT ELEPHANT NOW ON ESTATE' was too much for me. So I despatched Ahmat, my tracker to make some investigations. (…)

Note on AHMAT, the Tracker – Ahmat was a son of Lebai Jamil, a famous old big game tracker of Batang Benar in Negri Sembilan. Elsewhere the late Mr. Banks writes of him: 'Ahmat is a splendid tracker and right good fellow to boot. He has had a lot of expertise with dangerous game when hunting with Mr. Theo Hubback and the late Mr. Cyril Ephraums. I shall certainly always employ him on future hunting trips.' (…)

Again Mr. BANKS comments: 'If I hunt for another five years or so with Ahmat I should not be surprised if I became quite a fair tracker. I find I am already able to spoor wild beast over ground, where a few years back I should have seen nothing.'[9]

The late Mr. Banks and his tracker Ahmat, with a bull elephant killed at Ulu Telom, Pahang, in 1926

Hoisting a young Elephant over the side

It was Babe's turn next. Not only had she demonstrated at Rangoon that she didn't enjoy being swung through space but she had also been listening to the protests of her predecessors. The others were too small to cause much trouble but Babe was a big husky lady, with a capacity for making trouble if sufficiently frightened. Having seen her balk at Rangoon, I should have loaded her first instead of giving her the chance to remember that this was a business she did not like.

The Girl from Rangoon had made up her mind that she was not going to be swung aboard the lighter. She balked the second we tried to get the sling around her belly. She would not have any of it. That was her story and she stuck to it. (…)

I figured that if I could get between the animal's legs front legs, Ali could throw me the end of the sling quickly and we could get it on her. (…)

I rushed in and as I did Babe reached down with her trunk and raised me straight up in the air over her head as if to say, 'Well, how do you like being lifted off the ground?' I was about ten feet up in the air but not for more than a second. She let go, throwing me straight forward with every bit of strength she had, which was plenty, sending me a distance of ten to twelve feet. I landed smack on my bottom, sitting down with enough vehemence to dislocate a less battle-tried posterior, and sliding forward four or five feet on the loose gravel with which the dock was covered. Good upholstery is all that saved me. (…)

Not the least amusing phase of this experience was the way the story of my encounter with Babe on the dock at Singapore spread. I'll never know who started it, but it certainly got under way. All along the coast of Asia the newspaper carried stories to the effect that I had been fatally injured in a tussle with the biggest and most ferocious elephant ever seen on the island of Singapore, – probably the most terrible animal of any kind ever seen anywhere, capable of wiping out a dozen tigers with a butt of the head or a stamp of the foot.[10]

Seladang

The Resident of Selangor has placed on loan a bull of the Seladang (Bibos Gaurus). This animal, shot by Mr H.C. SYERS, Superintendent of Police, Selangor, was sent to Mr Rowland WARD of 166, Piccadilly, London, to be set up, but the work has been so badly done that the animal is not in the least like what it was in life.[11]

The most fascinating, exciting and satisfactory big-game hunting in Malaya is the pursuit of seladang. Of all the jungle animals it is by far the most striking; the sight of an old bull, standing in the large forest sniffing the air for the source of the taint which has offended his sensitive nostrils, is a sight never to be forgotten.

The seladang looks truculent but is by temperament timid and inoffensive. A wounded seladang – in fact, any wounded large animal – may be a formidable opponent, but the silly stories one hears of seladang charging at sight are all bunkum and merely the childish gossip of ignorant people.[12]

The seladang was staring over his shoulder at us and almost immediately I got a good view of his horns which I realised at once were a fine pair, of that dark olive tint so beloved by the hunter but so difficult to see in the thickness of the jungle. I wasted no time now in firing at his shoulder. He gave a great bound forward, turned half round, going away from us all the time and quite invisible after the shot, and then fell crashing to the ground to rise no more. His death-groan was the signal for us to close up, and his throat was cut with the usual ceremony by Yasin, but low down on the neck to enable the skin to be utilised for setting up at some future date. He had a magnificent head one of the finest that

The Malayan Seladang[13]

I have ever obtained. The horns had an outside span of 39″; but he had a disappointing shoulder measurement, only just touching 17 hands. We were fairly close to the river, although some way down-stream from the place where we had left the boat, but it was early in the day, so I sent Sahat back to camp for another boat, the men who I had left in camp, and my camera. He followed a track back which took him through a kampong called Ulu Memgkuang, and there passed the word that seladang meat was to be had for the asking and described the locality of the kill. About 10 a.m. a large collection of Malays, men, women and children, arrived with an expectant look on their faces and with many an ejaculation of astonishment at the size of the dead beast. I would not, however, let them cut it up until I had done what was necessary with my camera.

A peculiar incident occurred which was quite unique in my experience. With the Malays from Ulu Mengkuang was an old man, tall and spare, who obviously had no interest in the meat side of the question because he was entirely devoid of teeth. This old man was much interested in the place where the seladang's throat had been cut. He carefully examined it and then remarked that it was customary to cut the throat of a buffalo much higher up. I explained that I wanted to save the scalp with a good portion of the neck for setting-up purposes, but this did not convey very much to him. Before the arrival of the camera I left the carcase for some time to examine the tracks of the other seladang, and while I was away the old man evidently had a good deal to say about this, to him, extraordinary way of killing a beast which was supposed to be halal. On the arrival of the men from my camp, I took several photos of the bull, and then gave orders to start and cut the beast up, commencing myself to work on his head.

I presently noticed that most of the men from Mengkuang were doing nothing, and very shortly they began to move off in twos and threes without taking any meat at all. I called to some of them and asked them where they were going to, and was told that as the bull was an old one the eating of the meat would bring out sores on their legs!!!

Of course I was not deceived by this explanation, but did not press the point and the Ulu Mengkuang contingent departed. Afterwards I asked the other Malays the reason of this sudden change, and they said that Orang Tua, I forget his name, had told them that as the throat of the beast had not been cut directly beneath the ears, they should not eat any of the meat because it was haram. Where he got this idea from I do not know, perhaps some of my more enlightened readers can tell me. The remaining natives did not consider it haram and so got all the more meat.

Unfortunately the photographs that I took of this seladang, together with a good many others, were ruined by the damp before I had the opportunity of developing them; I thus lost many pleasant reminiscences of this expedition. (The accompanying photograph of a seladang is not of this beast but of a very old bull that I got on another occasion in the Krau Valley).[14]

Orang Utan

The natives, who form the bulk of the visitors, find their greatest attraction not so much in specimens which offer only a scientific interest, as in those appealing to their emotions, such as the snakes, and chiefly the human skeleton, flanked by two orang utan skeletons which this year happened to be placed in a prominent position. That a tree trunk against which one of the orang utan skeletons is mounted, after having been several months in the case, began suddenly to sprout, bearing green twigs for several months, may have added to the attraction and is certainly a museum curiosity.[15]

So much has been written about the relationship between men and apes, that we were particularly anxious to see the great orang-outang in his native home; and marching through the jungle to the nest-caves, we were fortunate enough to see and to secure two apes (…)

We give a portrait of the largest male orang; it shows very well the enormous size of his arms, compared with his legs, and his short paunchy body. The expression and attitude do not, however, do him justice. He was just killed, and had not become stiff; and his jaw had fallen, like that of a dead man. So we had to put a prop under one shoulder, and tie an arm to a tree, while Mr. Cooke, who had shot him, supported the back of his neck. The mouth had to be tied up, with a stone inside, to make anything of a photograph of him, and Dr. Walker held the other arm. This makes the animal look mis-shapen; but, even at his best, he did not seem so human as had been expected.[16]

The Dyaks all declare that the mias is never attacked by any animal in the forest, with two rare exceptions; and the accounts I received of these are so curious that I give them nearly in the words of my informants, old Dyak chiefs, who had lived all their lives in the places where the animal is most abundant. The first of whom I inquired said: 'No animal is strong enough to hurt the mias, and the only creature he ever fights with is the crocodile. When there is no fruit in the jungle, he goes to seek food on the banks of the river, where there are plenty of young shoots that he likes, and fruits that grow close to the water. Then the crocodile sometimes tries to seize him, but the mias gets upon him and beats him with his hands and feet, and tears him and kills him.' He added that he had once seen such a fight, and that he believes that the mias is always the victor.

My next informant was the orang kaya, or chief of the Balow Dyaks, on the Simunjon River. He said: 'The mias has no enemies; no animals dare attack it but the crocodile and the python. He always kills the crocodile by main strength, standing upon it, pulling open its jaws, and ripping up its throat. If a python attacks a mias, he seizes it with his hands, and then bites it, and soon kills it. The mias is very strong; there is no animal in the jungle so strong as he.'[17]

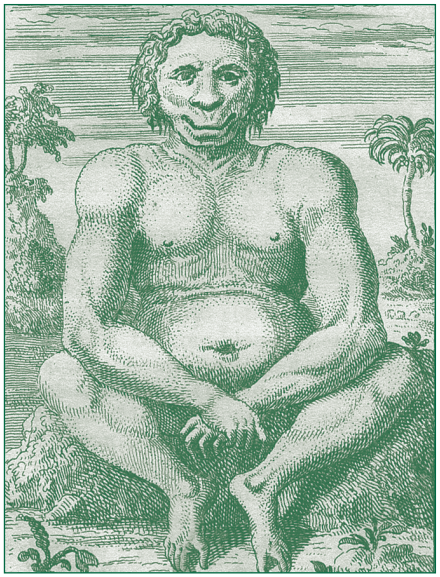
The Monkeys, Apes, and Baboons are of many different sorts and shapes; but the most remarkable are those they call Oran-ootans, which in their language, signifies Men of the Woods: These grow up to be six foot high; they walk upright, have longer arms than men, tolerable good faces (handsomer I am sure than some Hottentots that I have seen), large teeth, no tails nor hair, but on those parts where it grows

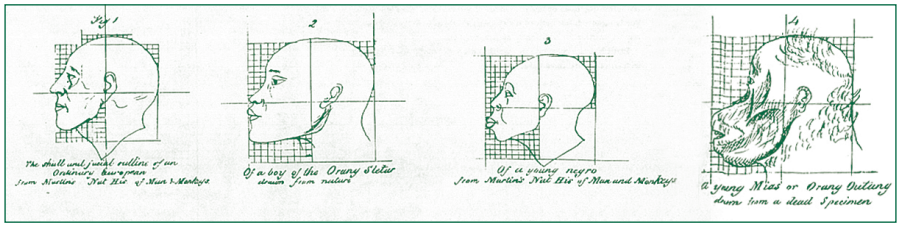
Photograph possibly taken by Cecil Bodon Kloss in the early 1900s[18]

on humane bodies; they are very nimble footed and mighty strong; they throw great stones, sticks and billets at those persons that offend them. The Natives do really believe that these were formerly Men, but metamorphosed into beasts for their blasphemy. They told me many strange stories of them, too tedious to be inserted here. I bought one out of curiosity, for six Spanish Dollars; it lived with me seven months, but then died of a flux; he was too young to show me many pranks, therefore I shall only tell you that he was a great Thief, and loved strong Liquors; for if our backs were turned, he would be at the Punch-bowl, and very often would open the Brandy Cafe, take out a Bottle, drink plentifully, and put it very carefully into its place again.[19]

Judged by our standard of human beauty, he was perhaps as ugly as any healthy child could be and live; but, for all that, his homeliness was interesting; it seemed to conform to a general plan of ugliness, and nothing was lacking to make it perfect. But, judged by the standard of anthropoid beauty, he was as handsome and wholesome a little orang as ever climbed. His eyes were large, bright and full of intelligence, and he had a forehead like a philosopher.

Because of his bald and shiny head, his solemn, wrinkled and melancholy visage, his air of profound gravity and senatorial wisdom, we got to calling him the Old Man, and forgot to give him any Christian name. A thin growth of brick-red hair grew straight up the back of his head and over the crown, making, in certain lights, a perfect halo around his bald, brown pate, reminding one rather forcibly of certain pictures by the old masters.[20]

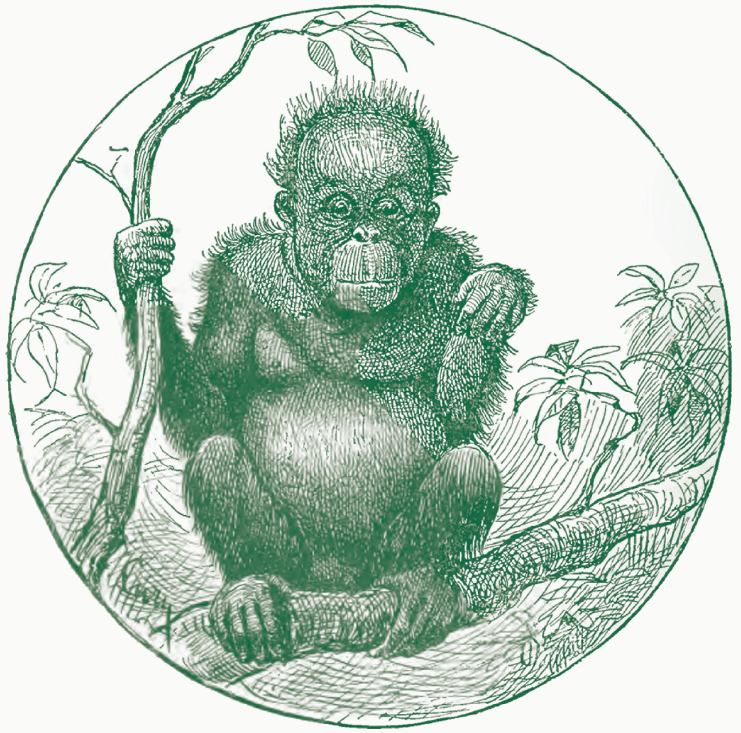




Above right: Orang Utan attacked by Dyaks [21]
Below: Fig. 2

Opposite: The 'Old Man' (Young Orang-Utan)

Fig. 2 gives the facial outline and skull of a Boy of the Slétar tribes who possessed in rather an exaggerated degree the marked peculiarities of the physiognomy of his race, and in order to render such peculiarities palpable to the eye of the observer I have enclosed the outline within a square (…), and by finding the number of 100ths. contained in each square the relative proportions in numbers can at once be ascertained (…), which would place the Orang Slétar intermediate between the European and Negro in expansion of the organs of intellect, and again shows them to possess a greater development of the jaws and 'organs subservient to sensation and animal faculties than either.' (Prichard's Natural History of Man) The drawing of the Mias, sometimes called Orang Utan in this country and commonly Oráng Outáng in Europe, is given to show the wide difference between it and the subjects of this paper, who are generally known to the Malays as Orang Utan, thus confounding them with the lower creation.[22]



THE "OLD MAN." (YOUNG ORANG-UTAN.)
(*From an instantaneous photograph.*)

The Prince's Gift

Erika Tan

After the 1922 Malaya-Borneo exhibition in Singapore, a number of the natural history exhibits were donated by the Prince of Wales to the London Zoo. What became of these animals has yet to be fully researched, some would have ended up in the Natural History Museum as specimens, others in the houses of the rich. Tracing any genealogical offspring and any connection with current zoo occupants has been impossible to do, thus far. The list of animals is as follows.

1 Orang Utan
1 White Handed Gibbon
1 Dusky Langur
3 Siamese Langurs
5 Common Macaques
4 Pig Tailed Macaques
4 Slow Lorris
3 Tigers
4 Black Leopards
2 Clouded Leopards
4 Leopard Cats
2 Tibetan Mastiffs
1 Himalayan Fox
1 Tibetan Fox
1 Sumatran Civet
2 Binturongs
1 Himalayan Bear
1 Sun Bear
1 Bicoloured Squirrel
1 Prevosts Squirrel
2 Hoary Headed Squirrels
5 Long Tailed Porcupines
2 Brush Tailed Porcupines
1 Indian Elephant
1 Indian Rhinoceros
4 Sambur Deer
4 Javanese Mouse Deer
4 Napu Mouse Deer
3 Domestic Sheep
1 Kashmir Goat

2 Nonpareil Finches
2 White Headed Mannikins
2 Java Sparrows
2 Sharp Tailed Finches
1 White Bellied Finch
1 White Billed Hornbill
1 Blue Crowned Hanging Parakeet
1 Pagoda Owl
I Malayan Hawk Eagle
1 Goshawk
2 White Necked Storks
5 Waglers Egrets
1 Black Crested Bitten
3 Javan Adjutants
2 Indian Adjutants
15 Green Winged Doves
23 Spotted Turtle Doves
1 Barred Dove
2 Grey Pigeons
1 Southern Fruit Pigeon
8 Nutmeg Fruit Pigeons
1 Jambu Fruit Pigeon
4 Blue Tailed Fruit Pigeons
5 Painted Quails
1 Black Breasted Button Quail
8 Chukar Partridges

5 Crowned Wood Partridges
1 Wood Francolin
3 Long Billed Francolins
2 Himalayan Monauls
1 Koklass Pheasant
2 Nepal Kaleege Pheasants
5 Argus Pheasants
4 Rufous Tailed Fireback Pheasants
1 Vieillots Fireback Pheasant
4 Javan Peafowls
5 Common Peafowls
1 Red Jungle Fowl
1 Sharpe's Crane
3 White Breasted Gallinules
1 Water Cock
2 Hawk Billed Turtles
1 Baska Water Tortoise
3 Spinose Land Emys
3 Oldham's Terrapins
1 Porose Crocodile
I Bengal Monitor
4 Reticulated Pythons
1 Indian Python
4 Black Cobras
1 Hamadry

Curious Texts / Telling Images: Excerpts From The Malaya-Borneo Exhibition And British Empire Exhibition

Wong Lee Min

The following collection of images and texts revisits primary sources from the Malaya-Borneo Exhibition (Singapore, 1922) and the British Empire Exhibition (London, 1924–1925). It redeploys historical fragments in new arrangements possibly contrary to their creators' intent, as an attempt and invitation to readers to tease out alternative meanings from them. Held to honour the visit of the Prince of Wales (later Edward VIII), the Malaya-Borneo Exhibition spanned a 68-acre site on Robinson Road and lasted for a fortnight from 31 March to 15 April 1922. Building on this show, Malaya participated in the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley, which aimed to promote imperial trade and unity. For two seasons, from 23 April to 1 November 1924 and from 9 May to 31 October 1925, the country presented its people, natural resources and products in a standalone pavilion. The hybrid Indo-Saracenic architectural style in operation was a British invention imported from India, and had been employed in Malaya for around thirty years by the 1920s.[23]

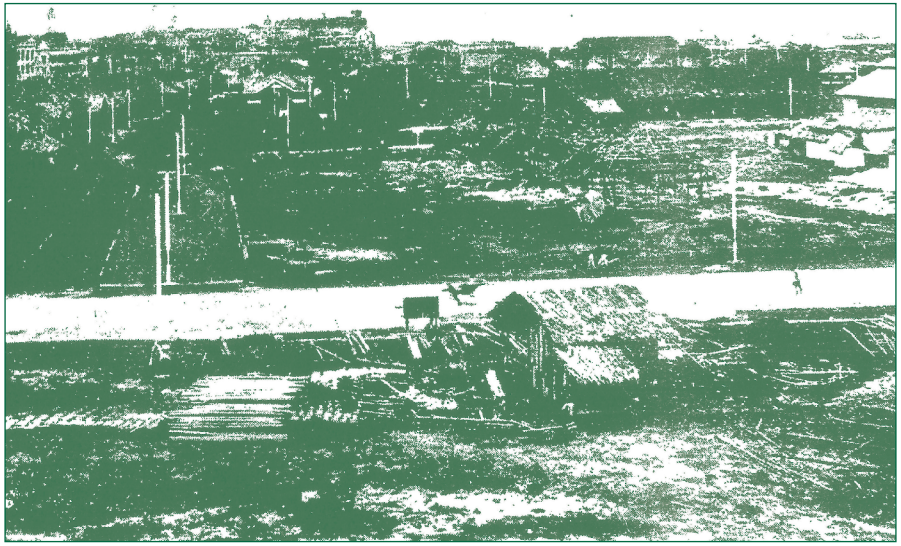
Montage 1 compares kampong-style thatched houses in the Malaya-Borneo Exhibition with the British Empire Exhibition's Indo-Saracenic Malaya Pavilion. While the exhibitions were only two years apart, they appeared two worlds apart in their interpretations of what architecturally represented Malaya.

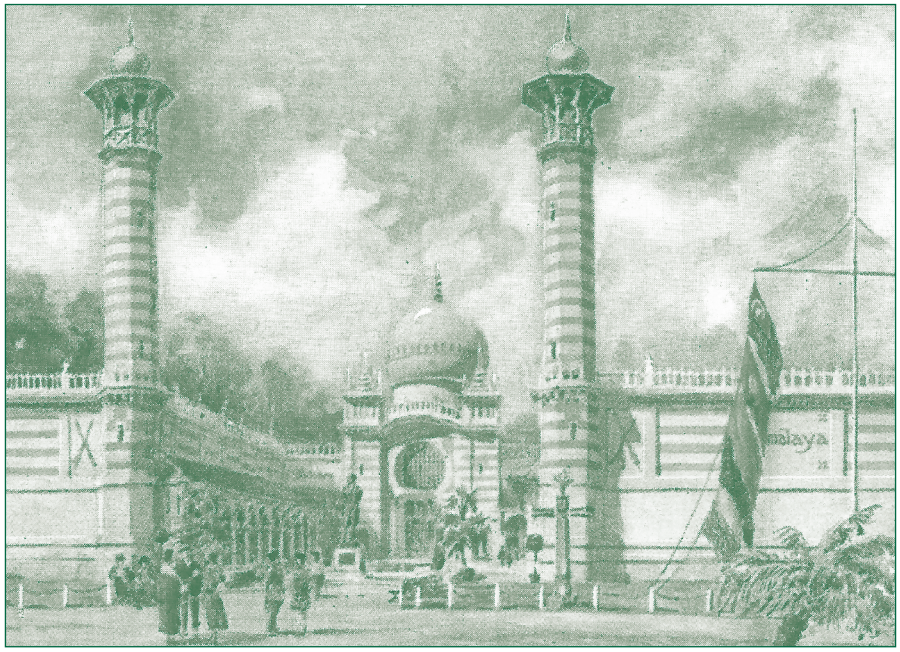
Montage 2 identifies the agency of humans who performed as ethnographic exhibits and captures instances when these exhibits were not just gazed upon, but looked back at their viewers. Who exactly was on exhibition, one wonders.

Montage 3 lingers over omissions, slippages and embellishments that underscore the colonialist imaginary, restoring attention to things and people that were easily passed over or once deemed as unimportant. Recognised here are the humour behind authorial slips or sleights of hand, and the elements of storytelling contained in representations. The juxtaposition and inter-textual reading of sources from the two exhibitions prompts inquiries into the construction of representations by a variety of actors with different motivations, this author included.

Montage 1: Architectures of Malaya
With household wares, weapons, and their families, [the dyaks from Borneo] have built up an exact replica of the usual communal house, with its long tunnel-like structure of matting and bamboo, raised on stilts in the exhibition grounds, in which they live as they do in Borneo. From the rafters hang the human trophies in clusters of six and eight, with hair and teeth still attached like chandeliers in a European drawing-room.[24]

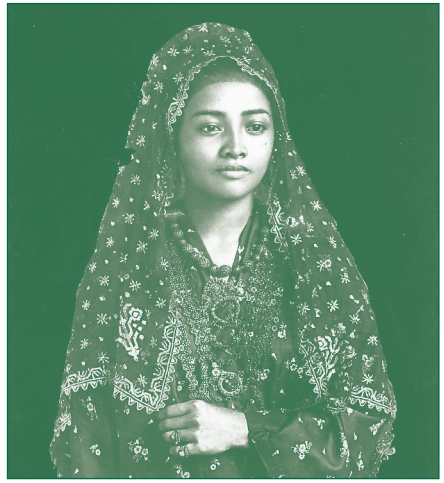
Montage 2: On Agency and Gazing Back
Forty-two Dyaks have already arrived from Sarawak and are busy at the moment building their house in the Exhibition grounds. The Murut house from B.N. Borneo I am afraid will not materialise; there are evidently difficulties in getting the men out of the interior. A typical Malay house has been secured and should be here this week.[27]





Montage 1: Architectures of Malaya. The Malaya-Borneo Exhibition Grounds under Construction, 1922[25]
Montage 1: Architectures of Malaya. Indo-Saracenic-styled Malaya Pavilion, British Empire Exhibition, London 1924–25[26]

Montage 2: On Agency and Gazing Back. Malay Woman, Malaya-Borneo Exhibition Singapore, 1922[32]



Montage 2: On Agency and Gazing Back. A Malay Lady of Noble Birth, British Empire Exhibition, London 1924–25[33]

I am particularly anxious to get the chutam man [from Kedah for the British Empire Exhibition] and if necessary would be [sic] prepared to give rather better terms if essential to secure him.[28]

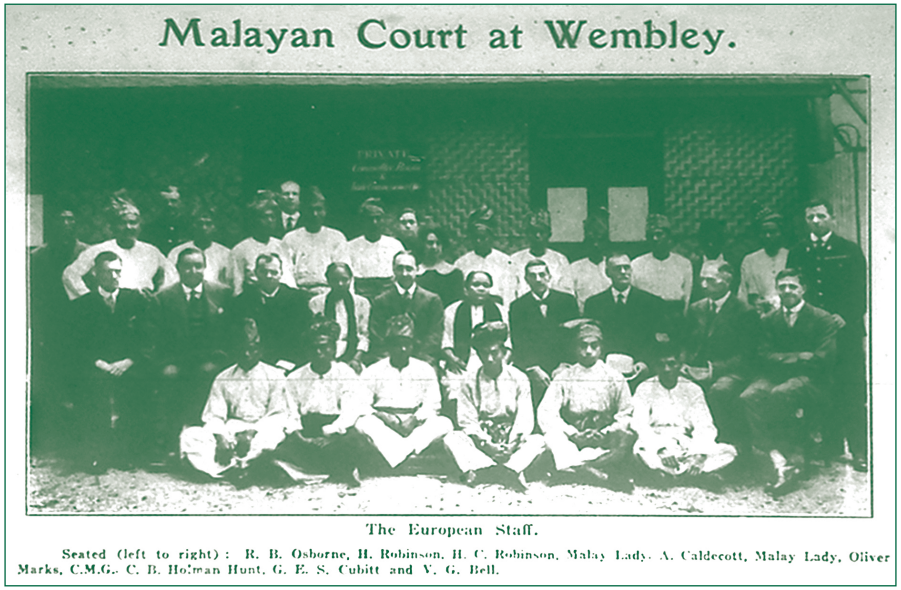
I regret to inform you that the Chutam workers have definitely refused to go to England. It is not a question of pay or conditions. They are, with the exception of the woman, afraid of the whole adventure. Both the Regent and Haji Wan Yahya have tried to persuade them but without avail.[29]

So, by way of giving the wild men from Borneo and the wild women from Malaya a treat, I went, and then I went and went again and again. (…) The wild men from Borneo I met did not strike me as being particularly fierce sorts of people. None of them gnawed skulls or even hambones…[30]

If ever they should have a London Exhibition on the Gold Coast, they should not omit a replica, in miniature, of the West Industry Cafe. A dozen typical Lyonsites, with 'misses' bustling in and out, and a back-cloth of pastries and ice cream bricks: the natives would crush to see us even as we crush to see the natives amusing themselves on mouth-organs. And the natives, I am sure, would be impressed.[31]

Montage 3: Authorial Slips and Embellishments

On the occasion of Queen Mary's visit to the Malaya Pavilion at Wembley on May 21, one of the Malay workers, Shariffa Noor binti Sayed Hassan al Atas, of Johore, presented the Queen with a beautiful silk sarong which she had just finished weaving. Subsequently I met the good lady and it was very amusing to hear her relate the incident and describe how the Queen insisted on shaking hands with her. She did feel proud and she is very anxious to



Montage 3: Authorial Slips and Embellishments. Malay Basket Makers at Wembley, 1925[34]
Montage 3: Authorial Slips and Embellishments. Malaya Pavilion Staff at Wembley, 1925[35]

have her friends in Johore and elsewhere know of it. If you will look up your London Illustrated, Wembley number, you will see her photo. She is in the upper left hand corner of a page containing several photos of various nationalities. Unfortunately they have entitled her 'a dusky beauty from the gold coast.'[36]

Malay Pavilion 1924/25: Performing Artefacts

Erika Tan

British Empire Exhibition
1924: Malay Contingent

Kedah

1. Penghulus Mohamed Taha
2. Muhamed Arifin Johore
3. & 4. Syed Drus And Wife Sarifah Noor (dissent and left early in August)

Singapore

5. Fatimah (women expert weavers)
6. Halimah Binti Abdullah (women expert weavers) – contracted double pneumonia – died 1924, Willesden Green Hospital. Buried with full Muslim rites in cemetery belonging to Woking Mosque – deed allotment No.189, 343 – funeral arranged by London Necropolis Company
7. Omar (women, expert weavers) (dissent and left early in August)

Perak

8. Yeop Mohamed – Silversmiths
9. Alang Mat Yasin – Silversmiths
10. Abdullah – Basket Maker
11. Ramli – Geological Assistant
12. Mayah – Geological Assistant

Selangor

13. Mat Yasin – Cook
14. Abas – Assistant Cook
15. Abdul Wadud – Museum Attendant
16. Kechik – General Attendant

Pahang

17. Ismail – Carpenter
18. Selmah – Weaver

Others

19. Hashim – Mining Overseer
20. Mohamed Hashim – Forest Ranger

1925: Malay Contingent

From previous year

1. Abas – Assistant Cook
2. Abdul Wadud – Museum Attendant
3. Fatimah (women expert weavers)

Singapore

4. & 5. Timah – Weaver, and Husband Indut – best Salesman

Perak

6. Mat Dahim – Geological Assistant
7. Itam Ahmad – Geological Assistan

Selangor

8. Abdul Hamid – Assistant Cook
9. Sabudin – Museum Attendant
10. Mohamed Shariff – teachers in basketry from Tanjong Malim College
11. Zainudin – teachers in basketry from Tanjong Malim College Negri Sembilan: party of basket makers.
12. & 13. Penghulu Abdul Latip and Sheikh Ahmad. (both became ill and hospitalised, Ahmad having an operation.)
14. Mahmud
15. Din
16. Mat Som
17. Sat Dolah
18. Ayob

Others

19. Mat Yasin – Forest Ranger
20. Hamzah – Mining Overseer

Other Visitors/Help

1. Raja Kechil Tengah – Perak (Raja Said Tauphy) and Enchek Hamzah – both Malayan Civil Service – seconded for half years service.
2. Raja Said Tauphy – in charge of Malay contingent en route for England – recognised for services to the pavilion – appointed member of British Empire Order.
3. Raja Muda from Selangor also came daily during his stay in London.

The Malay House: A Representational Trope

Erika Tan

Situated as it is, with the river flowing before it, the appearance of a Malay village amongst its palms and other fruit trees is exceedingly picturesque, the graceful aspect of the waving trees, with their beautiful columnar trunks, and feathery fronds, shading the quaint bamboo palm-thatched structures, being pleasing in the extreme. There is but little attention paid to order; but the houses are placed here and there according to the taste and convenience of the owner, who readily plants cocoa-nut trees around, though he has to wait about seven years for their fruiting. When there are so many houses that a double row occupies the river-bank, a line of communication exists between them that does not deserve the title of road, for the Malay never thinks of constructing anything of this kind, but leaves as much as possible to Dame Nature. In this case the houses are built, and as the people walk to and fro the path comes of itself.

. . . It is unlucky to stand with arms resting on the steps of a ladder going up to the house for the purpose of talking to one of the inmates, because if a corpse is carried out of the house there must be a man below in that position to receive it: to assume this attitude unnecessarily therefore is to wish for a death in the family. In selecting timber for the uprights of a Malay house, care must be taken to reject any log which is indented by the pressure of parasitic creeper that may have wound round it when it was a living tree: a log so marked, if used in building a house, will exercise unfavourable influence in childbirth, protracting delivery."

As for the space under the house,* it is generally devoted to an olla-podrida of filthiness. Sometimes a cow or a pony are tied to the house-post. We read in the "Sejarah Melayu" how Raja Zainal, the brother of Sultan Mahmud Shah, "had a horse named, 'the Skiddler,' of which he was extremely fond, and which he stabled hard by his sleeping apartment and emptied a lower room for that purpose, and twice or thrice in a night he would go and see him!" All the small live stock inhabit the shady recesses: the poultry confined at night on an enclosed shelf under creels. To add variety to the nastiness, kitchen refuse is thrown from above, and there is a hole cut in the floor of the back verandah to serve as a latrine for children and sick elders!

J.F.A. McNair[37]
R.J. Wilkinson[38]
R.J. Wilkinson[39]

The smaller galleries allotted to Canada are not yet completely in order. In the upper gardens a Malay house has been erected by the Government of Perak, the materials having been sent from that country, and put together in London by Malays brought over for the purpose. It is made entirely of a sort of of basketwork, and consists of an open-air reception room, a dwelling-house, and a separate room for cooking. The special interest, however, to European visitors consists in the building being raised on piles several feet above the ground, and thus showing the strange resemblance between a modern Malay house and the Lake dwellings of ancient Switzerland, so familiar to us through models and drawings in museums. Although there is no connection between the two races, yet similar circumstances and states of society have caused the styles of architecture to be almost identical

Suddenly the first trace of human habitation appears, in the shape of a Malay campong or village —a cluster of houses of bamboo and other wood, in a grove of cocoa-nut palms and other fruit-trees. The huts are raised on posts, so as to be beyond the reach of flood and noxious beast, and look neat with their woven sides of split bamboo or reed, while their roofs are thatched with attap, an arrangement of the palm-leaves, that grow close at hand.

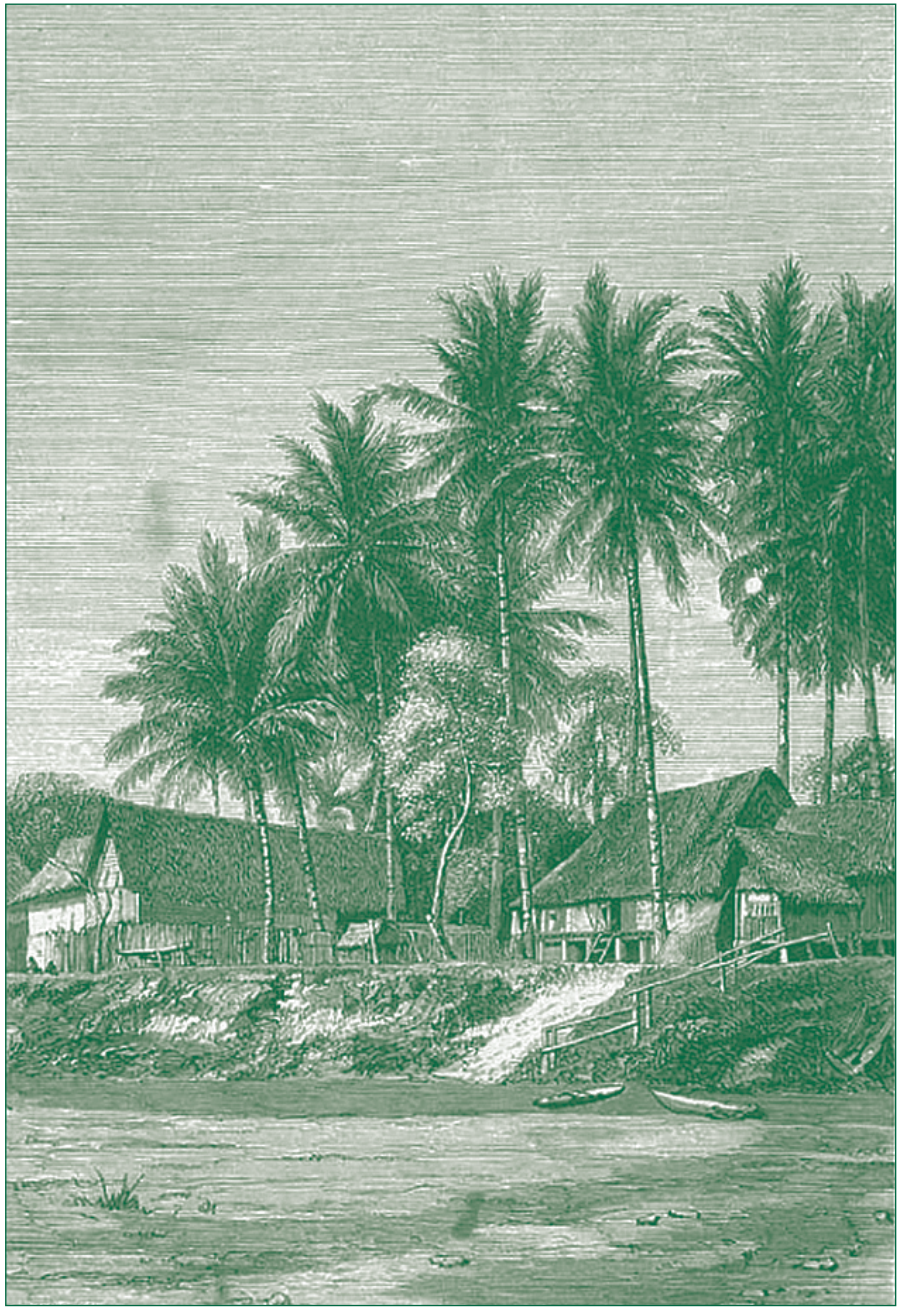
Indian And Colonial Exhibition, London. 1886.[40]
J.F.A. McNair[41]
Illustration of the Malay village of the Colonial and Indian Exhibition 1886[42]

If a cock and a hen copulate on the roof of a Malay house, they are caught and killed. Both are then skinned and the skins placed on slender poles planted in the ground, one on each side of a path. A cross piece is often tied to the upright, a little way from the top, in order that the skin of the body may be spread over it, while the head and neck of each bird rest on the end of the upright. The flesh of the birds is eaten by the people of the house. The action is said to be chelaka, i.e. unchancy. (I saw two or three instances of crucifixion of this kind when in Upper Perak in 1913).

Wood must not be chopped on the threshold of a house, or the owner will be bitten by a snake or centipede when he goes to the jungle. (From a Malay of Kampong Perak, Batu Kurau, Perak, whom I heard rebuking his wife for thus chopping firewood).

Nobody should lie with legs sprawled out of a doorway. Or a tiger will come to the village. (From the same Malay as above, who had occasion to rebuke his wife in my hearing for breaking this tabu also).
I.H.N. Evans[43]

'Malaysian' house, Eden Project, Cornwall.
House posts, Rumah Tok Su, Kedah, Malaysia
Opposite: Kampong on Perak River[44]



Repetition, Rehearsal, Remake

Rumah Tok Su: Virtual Reconstructions

Nazrita Ibrahim

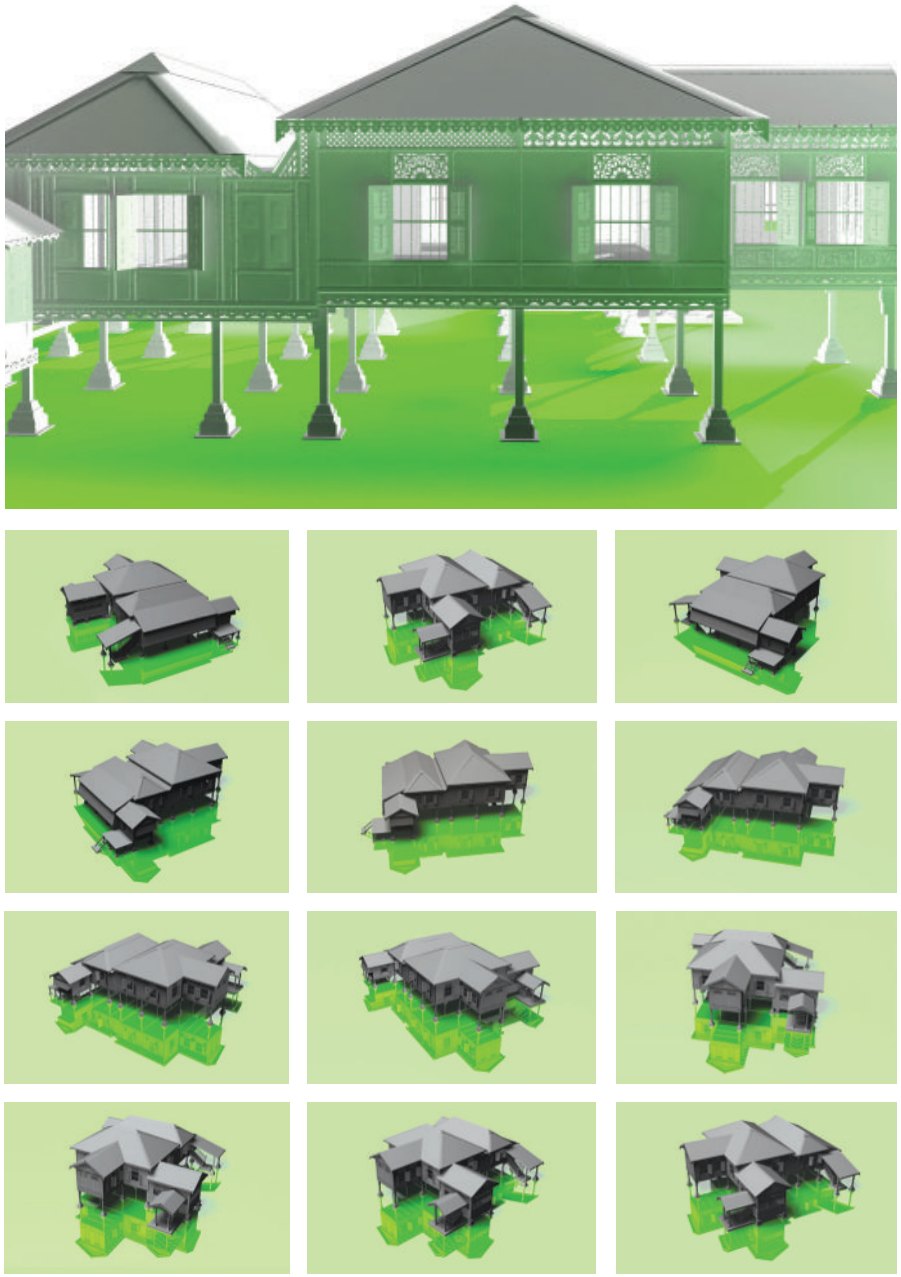
3D Rumah Tok Su, image courtesy of Preserving Malay Architectural Project, Universiti Tenaga Nasional

A traditional Malay house is an example of architectural heritage that belongs to the Malays; one of the many ethnic groups residing in Malaysia. The Malays designed and built their houses according to their needs, and with a good understanding of nature and the environment, they incorporated and reflected their way of life and culture. However, these beautiful traditional houses are fast becoming extinct, due to the current generation of Malays embracing a modern lifestyle and modern house forms. This has resulted in a lack of interest and appreciation of traditional Malay houses by the younger generation. Most of the remaining traditional Malay houses are either being left to deteriorate, or no attempts being made to repair or restore the house to their former condition. Furthermore, maintaining or building new traditional Malay houses can be expensive; largely due to the high price of the timber used in their construction, and the scarcity of *tukang* (skilled carpenters) who have the knowledge and expertise to build these houses.

Efforts have been made to preserve the houses that still exist. Some have been disassembled and reassembled again in other locations, such as museums or heritage centre compounds. However, with the advancement of information technology, the preservation of this architectural heritage can be achieved by recreating these buildings in a 3D form.

Since traditional Malay houses contain complex architecture details, such as *kerawang* (decorative carvings used for ventilation purposes, and to allow just enough light to enter the house during the day), or construction techniques, such as *tanggam* (a technique used to join parts of the house), the 3D forms can also serve as a blueprint to capture these unique construction techniques and preserve this architectural knowledge for the benefit of future generations.

The process however is not straightforward. Each Malay house is unique, although similar architectural features exist across houses; there is no original blue print to return to. Every single construction feature had



Camera moves: Approach / Circumnavigate / Spiral / Pan / Spin / Dissect / 360°
Mirage, Erika Tan, stills from single channel video, 2013

to be manually documented, including those inaccessible or hidden from view. To remodel parts of the house that were inaccessible or hidden from view, another house with similar architectural features was used as reference.

The main output of this project is a comprehensively created 3D model that captures all of the important features of a traditional Malay house in its finest detail. The final rendering is without texture, remaining a grey tone, to highlight the beauty of the architectural details.

The original house chosen for this form of digital preservation is that of Rumah Tok Su, a traditional Malay house situated in Alor Setar, Kedah, but originally from Bandar Baharu, 200km away. Rumah Tok Su was chosen because the house is still in a good condition and contains many beautiful and important architectural features that deserve preservation.[1]

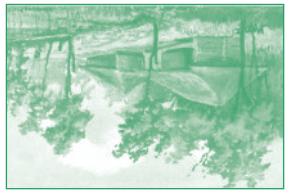
Mirage: Re-Using And Re-Phrasing The Malay House

Erika Tan

Mirage (left) is a short video work, animating a repeated approach, entry and fly through of a 3D Digital Traditional Malay House Model. The digital model is part of a heritage project exploring rendering processes within digital media. The artist has borrowed the house as a *location* to film within, and appropriates the reference placing it alongside earlier colonial representations of 'the Malay House'. The Malay House within in the context of Malayan Museology, photography and colonial travel/administrative and anthropological writing takes on the form of a trope. The process of description inscribes a permanency to its form and symbolic value.

Upsetting Postcards Of The Malay House

W. Patrick Wade



Pinned to the gallery wall like butterflies in a naturalistic display, a series of postcards arranged in a line depicts images of Malay houses and villages. The images on the face of the postcards have been flipped upside down, and the backs of the postcards are pinned to the wall below. The same cursive script adorns the backs of each postcard and informs the addressee of various social, cultural, or physical aspects of the Malay house: the material of which it is made, the environmental conditions from which it shelters, the status of its residents, or the superstitions and beliefs that govern social interactions in and around the house. 'It is unlucky to stand with arms resting on the steps of a ladder going up to the house for the purposes of talking to one of the inmates,' informs colonial administrator and historian Sir Richard James Wilkinson from the back of one of the postcards, 'because if a corpse is carried out of the house there must be a man below in that position to receive it. To assume this attitude unnecessarily is therefore to wish for a death in the family.'

There is no indication on the postcard or in the exhibition that Wilkinson – or anyone else – is the source. From the perspective of the museum visitor, the author is unknown and unknowable. Have several different authors been quoted across the postcards, their statements reflected in the writing of another, the artist/curator? Or have the statements been fabricated entirely? Are these statements the objective descriptions of a historical researcher, the romanticised impressions of a colonial master, or the factual declarations of a Malay informant? Might they be all three at once? What claims do such captions make to knowledge about the Malay house as a physical structure or social institution?

Like the hand-written messages, the photographs on the face of the postcard are of little help in addressing such questions. The images bear scant relationship to the text, depicting similar scenes of houses or villages captured from the same medium depth, the same coconut palms rising in the background, the same fields of mud and grass emerging in the foreground. The arrangement

Erika Tan, *Malay Postcard* series, 2013

of the images could be randomised with little effect on the display taken as a whole; as such, each postcard should function as an icon of the authenticity of the associated statement rather than its illustration or explanation.

Such iconicity has long been one of the major functions of the picture postcard in the colonial imaginary. As Malek Alloula suggests, 'What [the postcard] says in its idiom (that of the icon) has already been said by other means, much more brutal and more concrete: the means of operative colonialism. A ventriloquial art, the postcard even – and especially – when it pretends to mirror the exotic, is nothing but one of the forms of the aesthetic justification of colonial violence.'[2] It authorises the claims to knowledge made by the author of the postcard's text, the colonial master, by sending a visual artefact of the colony mastered back home to the imperial seat. To get a sense of the scope of this operation, between 1897 and 1901 alone, an estimated 500,000 postcards were sent from the Straits Settlements, with the period from 1906 to 1913 dubbed 'The Golden Era of Picture Postcards' in the region.[3]

But certain aspects of the museum display of these postcards challenge their legitimating function. The images themselves are digital copies, the photorealism of the images deformed by their low-resolution digital reproduction. The images are inverted, adding a further barrier to the viewers' capacity to comprehend what is on display, upsetting the easy familiarity of an object mastered through vision. The deformation, inversion, and repetition of visual form by the postcard series actively complicate the display's ability to convey knowledge about the Malay house.

The overall effect is the contestation of colonial ways of mastering the object. The process of cataloguing the colonial archive – the gathering and display of naturalistic objects, the reporting of facts about the beliefs, values, and attitudes of the indigenous population, the photograph as an authorisation of the objectivity of knowledge produced by the colonial apparatus – is relentlessly subverted by an exhibition that rips away the patrimony of the object, its origins and claims to authorship. And the role of the museum in constructing such knowledge

for visitors, too, is challenged. A visitor perusing the postcard series may come away with a sense of confusion, a sense that whatever is learned about the Malay house is fragmentary, unsettled, or upset. Rather than fixing the meaning of the house, the postcard series thus confronts the viewers with the inadequacy of museal, colonial, or other authoritative ways of 'knowing' the other.

Rehabilitating The Colonial Collection

David Henkel

All photos courtesy of the Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore

Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles was no stranger to museums. A man who aspired to scientific distinction, Raffles would advocate for the establishment of a museum in the new colony of Singapore, although it ultimately took 66 years for that vision to be realised. The beginnings of the Raffles Library and Museum's collection are somewhat murky and few early accessions to the collection can be positively identified. In 1849 the Temenggong of Johor is said to have given the colonial government two gold Malay coins for a museum collection. There are a number of these coins now in the collection and the two pieces in question can no longer be positively identified. The oldest identifiable accessions into the Raffles Museum collection are two pairs of Muslim grave stones dating to the 15th century, recovered from the rubble of the old Portuguese fortress of Malacca, which were given to the museum in 1852.

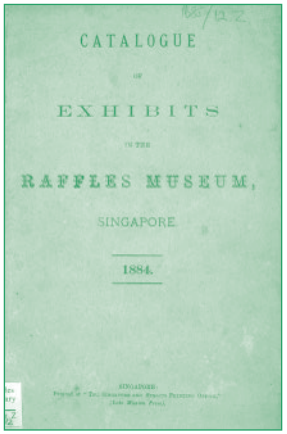
The new Raffles Library and Museum was ultimately built on Stamford Road in 1887. It was justified on both commercial and colonialist grounds. In a lecture given at Government House in Singapore in 1874 entitled 'Museums: Their Commercial and Scientific Uses',[4] James Collins makes the case that the museum should be a 'powerful aid to commerce' based on its ability to 'bring together as to one centre all the scattered useful products or other objects of interest.' At the same time, colonial administrators came to believe that by studying the societies they governed, including their material culture, they could gain many insights into their work.

Despite the protestations of men like Collins, who insisted that the museum be designed 'to be no mere collection of rarities and curiosities, at which the crowds may gaze in vacant and relentless astonishment',[5] throughout its early years the museum relied heavily on funds raised from public visitors. In fact in the decades following its opening, the museum came to be one of the main attractions in the city. It was a particularly popular destination for locals to visit on public holidays, the two days of Chinese New Year being the busiest days of the year. By 1930 over 300,000 visitors a year were being reported – an extraordinary number considering the population of Singapore at that time was something over 500,000 people.

The notion of a museum has its roots in human inquisitiveness and to a natural interest in rarities and oddities. Cabinets of curiosities, or wunderkammer, became something of a sensation in 16th and 17th century, as Europeans emerged from the Middle Ages. These collections were eclectic, a jumbled mix of natural history specimens, antiquities, and oddities brought back by travellers from distant places and there was an element of the sensational in their presentation. As things progressed the cabinet of curiosity began to merge with Linnaean notions of comprehensive and systematic classification which was to become the basis for the modern museum.

In the Singapore museum, exhibits like a stuffed Sumatran tiger displayed in the rotunda and the massive skeleton of an Indian fin whale which hung in the museum for nearly seven decades became icons, fondly remembered by generations of visitors. Initially, geography largely dictated the focus of the museum. In 1919 then new director John C. Moulton, largely due to space constraints, formally decided to limit the collections to the 'Malaysian area,' namely the Malay Peninsula, Borneo, Sumatra, Java and adjacent small islands. The overriding preoccupation of the museum was natural history and natural history specimens vastly outnumbered ethnological. Still, ethnological materials were collected at a steady rate.

Several attempts to catalogue the collections had been made – the first in 1884 – but the first comprehensive exercise only began in 1934 with the arrival of


CATALOGUE

OF

EXHIBITS

IN THE

RAFFLES MUSEUM,

SINGAPORE.

1884.

Assistant Curator H. D. Collings. Collings was the first curator with training in ethnology to join the museum and his efforts were a demonstration of the latest thinking in the field. Ultimately more than five thousand artefacts were accessioned, although it is clear that the records which Collings had to work with were already in a state of disarray. Many entries in the accessions books are incomplete and dotted with question marks as to the provenance or origins of the piece. This is of course very problematic for the use of the collection today as we are not always able to say with authority where an object was collected or who made it.

Paradoxically, it was precisely at the apex of the colonial museum in Singapore that Collings took up his work. Within less than a decade of his arrival, the island would be seized by the Japanese and the museum plunged into a desultory period of occupation, reoccupation, decolonisation and national development in which the museum and its collections evolved in fits and starts. The ethnology collection of the Raffles Museum was retained even as the institution was renamed as the National Museum in 1969, the new name quite explicitly indicative of the museum's new role as both a tool for national education and a more cosmopolitan venue for international exhibitions and shows. The collection has for the last two decades been in the care of the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM), which was formed after the National Museum was reorganised in 1993. The ACM's original mission was to explore the ancestral cultures of Singapore; China, with special emphasis on Fujian and Guangzhou provinces, Southern India, the Islamic World with particular reference to the Hadramouti, Gujarati and Malabari Muslims usually credited with bringing Islam to the region and of course Insular Southeast Asia, particularly those parts of the region where the Singapore Malay community trace their roots. Despite these rather programmatic goals though, the museum from the outset began to embrace a broader, more pan-Asian and cross cultural outlook, all of which has necessitated rethinking the old collection and how it is used.

Today we recognise a certain hubris in the fundamental premises of the colonial era museum. The notion that culture could in some way be scientifically collected and preserved for posterity has been thoroughly re-assessed and its faults exposed. We know the many problems and problematics involved in the acquisition and preservation of both the individual artefact and of the larger collection; of the misinterpretation, inaccuracies and loss of information about an object and its history, and even of the loss of the object, whether through neglect, theft or physical deterioration. Recognising the weaknesses of the colonial approach has forced new generations of curators and museum professionals to adopt novel ways of thinking and explore alternate methodologies.

This in turn has raised difficult questions about the interpretation of ethnological materials in the post-modern museum. For instance, can and should ethnological artefacts be interpreted as art? What agency does a curator have? Does the curator owe any fidelity toward the source community or to the original producer of an artefact? Is it disrespectful to display objects in novel or atypical ways? Do source communities, who may have evolved or transformed in fundamental ways, retain special agency or authority to interpret objects collected from their ancestral communities? These are all questions which elicit diverse, contentious and sometimes irresolvable answers.

Even as museology and museum praxis has evolved away from the inherently racist, typological and categorical collecting of the modernist, colonialist era, through the post-colonial, nationalist backlash to a now more post-modern, less assumptive and less essentialist epistemology, the collection and its interpretation are also evolving. The significance of the Raffles Library and Museum's collections lies, not so much in the value of the individual objects, even if some pieces in the collection are in fact rare and very important examples from now extinct material cultures. Rather, it serves as a document of a particular time, and especially place, in the development of museums. The collection is a rare survivor from which we can learn much about museums and the roles they play in society. It is not only a relatively comprehensive and intact collection from the high-modernist period of museum development but also one of the

Image from *Twentieth Century Impressions of British Malaya: its history, people, commerce, industries, and resources* (1908)
Arnold Wright and H.A. Cartwright

few and best preserved examples of such a collection assembled within and for a colony, as opposed to the ruling centre. Current and future generations of curators can and will continue to use and reinterpret parts of the collection but we should also recognise the inherent value of the collection as a whole.

The Perak Regalia: Replicas And Originals

Mulaika Hijjas

Among the items exhibited in the special display on 'Silver from the Malay World' at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London between July 2013 and March 2014 are three electrotype replicas of pieces of the Perak regalia: an armlet, a serving tray and a betel box. In Perak, as in other Malay states, the royal regalia – including betel sets, umbrellas, musical instruments, weapons and jewellery – were considered to be the essence of kingship. Malay usage often refers to the regalia as the *kerajaan*, or kingdom, itself. It is rather the possession of the regalia that legitimates the sovereign than the converse. The objects are said to be suffused with a power, *daulat*, that can only be safely wielded by a rightful king. In Perak, the regalia were believed to be the dwelling place of the thousand guardian spirits of the state, the *jin kerajaan*, which were feasted at annual rituals in their honour. In Selangor, wrongful use of the regalia – including making copies – was thought to result in the upstart being *kena daulat*, struck dead.[6]

It is doubtful that any employees of Elkington & Co., the London firm commissioned to electrotype selected items of the Perak regalia in 1887, were afflicted by *daulat*. The copies were made following the display of some of the regalia in the Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886, where they appeared by grace of the then reigning Sultan Idris of Perak. Commentary in the British press remarked upon the 'artistic merit' of the pieces and related the colourful tale of the origin of the regalia from beneath the sea,[7] but tactfully made no mention of the Perak War that had brought the regalia and Perak itself into British

hands, and Sultan Idris's predecessor to the throne. Nor were allusions made to the possession ritual or *main berhantu* held in 1875 by the first British-backed candidate for Sultan, Abdullah, at which the guardian spirits of the state, residing in the regalia, were exhorted to bring about the death of the 'man with white eyes.'[8] This was the first British Resident to Perak, J.W.W. Birch, who indeed drowned in the Perak River as the spirits had promised – having first been stabbed by Seputum, a follower of Sultan Abdullah's ally, the Datuk Maharajalela. British reprisals brought Perak firmly under colonial control. Sultan Abdullah was banished, while the Datuk Maharajalela, the Datuk Sagor and Seputum were hanged.

But Wilkinson's verdict that 'Malay history proper ends with them'[9] overstates the case, for the Perak aristocracy continues to rule, albeit as constitutional monarchs, while the British Empire is no more. The originals of the regalia remain in the hands of the Perak monarchy and continue to be used in royal ceremonies – though not, perhaps, in *main berhantu*. Nevertheless, that British intervention no doubt destroyed something of the sacral quality of the regalia is suggested by another item, the Mestika Embun, which is said to be a ball of petrified dew presented to the first Sultan of Perak in 1528. While Winstedt dismissed this object as mere glass,[10] the story given by one royal descendant is that the British in fact confiscated the original and replaced it with a 'crystal replica.'[11] Though this account neatly encapsulates the narrative in which original is falsified, magic dew turns to glass, and Malay sovereignty is violated, all at the hands of the British, it is well to remember that court accounts of the regalia begin with loss. *Silsilah Raja Perak* tells how the founder of the dynasty threw his crown into the sea to quell a storm,[12] which is why no Perak Sultan wears a crown. The regalia is always already incomplete, the state is always already fallen from its golden age.

Malay Manuscripts

Farouk Yahya

Hikayat Parang Puting (The Tale of Parang Puting), copied by Munsyi Ibrahim for T. S. Raffles, dated 29 Syawal 1225 AH / 27 November 1810 AD[16]

Image of *The Fame on Fire*

Prior to the widespread development of printing, up to the early twentieth century Malay texts were handwritten in the form of manuscripts, written in a modified Arabic script known as *jawi*. The texts include subjects such as literary works in prose, poetry, history, law, religion, medicine, magic and divination, and they attracted the interest of British colonial administrators who were stationed in Southeast Asia during the late eighteenth to early twentieth century. These individuals brought the manuscripts back to the United Kingdom, and the collections of figures such as William Marsden, Thomas Stamford Raffles and William Maxwell are now kept in institutions such as the British Library, the Royal Asiatic Society and the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS).[13]

Some of these manuscripts were bought, given as gifts or taken as war booty. However, often the local owners were reluctant to part with their possession, and thus the European collectors had to make do with borrowing the book and having it copied. These copies are typically distinguishable in that they are usually still in a very clean and good condition, and there is often a detailed colophon that gives the place and date of copying together with the name of the scribe and patron. The copying was usually done by local scribes. Raffles in 1805, for example, employed six scribes in Penang who included 'four Malays, one native of Mecca, and one native of the Coromandel coast'.[14] He later employed additional scribes in Melaka in 1810, one of whom was Munsyi Abdullah, who was later known as 'the father of modern Malay literature'.[15] Raffles's activities also extended to Java where he was Lieutenant-Governor between 1811–1816, during which time he commissioned further copies of Malay and Javanese manuscripts. Although some of the material that Raffles collected in the region were lost in a fire aboard his ship 'The Fame' in 1824, many of his manuscripts had already been brought back to England prior to that, and are now in the

LOSS OF THE SHIP FAME.

It is with much pain and sincere regret that we relate the following particulars of the loss by Fire of the H. C. C. Ship *Fame* with Sir STAMFORD and Lady RAFFLES on board. The *Fame* left Bencoolen Roads on the morning of the 2d Feb. bound for England. With a pleasant and fair breeze they lost sight of the high mountains of Sumatra towards evening. Between 8 and 9 o'Clock an alarm of fire was given from below and in a few minutes afterwards, the flames had communicated to the Poop. The progress of the destructive element was so rapid, as to render it utterly impossible to get the Ships Longboat hoisted out. They however succeeded in lowering down the two quarter boats, in which the whole of the passengers and Crew immediately embarked, and pulled off from the Ship at this time nearly in one entire blaze. The boats were 18 hours reaching Bencoolen where the sufferers landed in a most distressing and exhausted condition. The accident is supposed to have been occasioned by the carelessness of the Ships Steward in drawing off spirits in the hold.

We are informed that Sir STAMFORD was taking home on board the *Fame* a rare and extensive collection of Botanical, Geological and Zoological specimens made by himself during his residence in India. The loss of these valuable curiosities which have cost so much expense and labor in compiling is very deeply to be deplored.

Our advices state that Sir S. RAFFLES has chartered the Malacca free trader to convey himself and family to England.

By the *Good Hope* (the last arrival from South America) we are concerned to hear of the capture by Pirates of the Stanmore an English Ship belonging to Calcutta. She was taken on the 5th of Dec. while standing out of Valaparaiso bay and we are told within gun shot of the batteries.

* * * *

On Thursday the 16th Inst the Settlement was visited by a severe storm of thunder and lightning accompanied

Newspaper article, Singapore Chronicle, 29 April 1824

Royal Asiatic Society and the British Library in London.[17]

Unfortunately, the originals of the Malay manuscripts that were copied for Raffles and other European collectors are difficult to trace or are no longer extant, as the tropical climate of Southeast Asia means that perishable material such as paper decays much faster, alongside destruction by insects and fire. Therefore we do not know how far these copies resemble the originals in terms of text and art. More importantly, the act of taking the manuscripts to Europe invariably helped to save them – indeed many of the earliest known Malay manuscripts are those that have been preserved in Western collections, and in many cases constitute the only extant example of a particular text or style of painting.

Ancestral Figures: Collection, Acquisition, Access, Play. Three Approaches To Display

Clement Onn, Shabbir Hussain Mustafa, & Erika Tan

A group of wooden carved ancestor figures from Nias, Western Sumatra, Indonesia. Collected by Cerruti in 1887 and acquired from Perak Museum (Malay Peninsula) by The Raffles Museum (Singapore) in 1909 when it was re-structuring its collection focus on the Malay Peninsula. Catalogue image from *Hunters & Collectors*[18]

In 1886, Giovanni Battista Cerruti (1850–1914) *'accompanied the Italian scientists Elio Modigliani to Nias in 1886 and Austrian photographer Joachim von Brenner-Felsach in 1887. Through his association with these two men he came to donate some of his collection to the National Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence, an ethnographic museum in Rome and the Viennese Museum of Ethnology. The remaining part of his Nias collection was sold to the Perak Government who wanted to strengthen the collection of its local museum in Taiping'.* Clement Onn, *Hunters and Collectors*, Asian Civilisations Museum. 2009.[19]

Clement Onn:

Hunters & Collectors was an exhibition that explored the origins of the Southeast Asian collection at the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM). It told stories of independent collectors who came to Southeast Asia during the late 19th to early 20th centuries and how some of their collections were either donated or sold to the Raffles Library and Museum, Singapore's first museum estab-

Opposite: A view of the Nias figures collected by Giovanni Battista Cerruti around the early 20th century, *Hunters & Collectors: The Origins of the Southeast Asian Collection at the Asian Civilisations Museum.* © Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore

Camping And Tramping Through the Colonial Archives: The Museum In Malaya. NUS Museum, 2011–2013

3 Nias figures on display in the Ancestral Vitrine. Come Cannibalise Us, Why Don't You? / Sila Mengkanibalkan Kami, Mahu Tak? NUS Museum, 2013–2014

lished in 1849. Many of these ethnographic collections were then inherited by the Asian Civilisations Museum when the Singapore national collection was devolved to start new national museums in the early 1990s.

The exhibition design was meant to be light hearted, introducing elements of exploration and adventure trails. However, in the display of each showcase, the curator attempted to invoke a sense of nostalgia by placing more emphasis on the provenance of artefacts – how and, in some cases, why they were collected by these collectors. Personal stories written by collectors or secondary sources recorded by people who have worked or knew them were often used in the exhibition labels to further enhance this point. The significance and cultural context of the objects were de-emphasised. For example, a section including the Nias ancestor figures focussed on the collector of the objects, i.e. the explorer Cerruti. It also revealed that the figures were eventually acquired from Perak Museum in 1909 when the museum decided to limit its collection to ethnographic materials of the Malay Peninsula.[20] An album of ethnographic photographs was also displayed next to the figures. This was the only known donation given by Cerruti himself to the Raffles Museum. Some of the photographs were published in his book, *My Friends the Savages* (1908).[21]

Shabbir Hussain Mustafa:

The Nias ancestral figures were selected from the inventory of the *Hunters and Collectors* exhibition catalogue partly because they had been conserved and were considered ready for display at a much shorter notice, when compared to other objects in the National Collection, Singapore that may have required more attention. Within the gallery space, it was not immediately apparent where or how they would rest or be displayed, and as we continued to experiment, carefully placing them within the timeline of their accession into the Museum's collection, it increasingly became apparent that the figures had stories attached to them even after their accessioning. For instance, one figure had a chipped foot and needed the cradling hands of a trained conservator, another had the word 'NIAS' inscribed on its back. Somehow, its former-life, its original context, assumed to be more

authentic, potentiating spirituality and worship, appeared only equally interesting to its museum life. The hope was to highlight both, for that was *Camping And Tramping Through The Colonial Archive* – an exercise in self-reflexivity at the NUS Museum. The Nias figure with the inscription was shown with its back-turned towards the public. A difficult, but critical curatorial decision.

Not too far from the Nias figures was placed Mohammad Din Mohammad's sculpture titled *Raja Majun*: A figurative assemblage loosely dated 1996, with a large ball fruit for a head, recovered wooden parts for body and feet and outstretched arms made of animal bone, with clear label that it was a contemporary artwork. The hope was to cause slight confusion in the viewers' experience. A sly curatorial gesture, between the viewer encountering the Nias figures and their contemporary – the *Raja Majun*.

Erika Tan:
Can an object turn its back? What are the performative possibilities of the museum artefact? The 'ancestors': historical precursors to a contemporary moment, disciplinary trajectories, pyramidal structures, figure heads and heads of reckoning. The Nias figures, museum artefacts on loan from ACM, meet the headless Buddha from NUS Museum's collections, meet reproduction black Madonna, a MoMA gift shop figurine.

Subliminally, the use of craniums in the *Camping And Tramping* displays (set out in an ascending order of size) triggered images and imaginings of classical anthropometrical diagrams juxtaposing human craniums, apes and monkeys. Whilst this was evoked and not explicitly present, I have included in *Come Cannibalise Us, Why Don't You?* the use of hierarchical structures, and I have included both animal and human craniums. But there are competing structures and references in operation. The Nias ancestors each sit upon a piece of mylar, a protective film isolating it from the image below. The series of images: The ethnographer and museum curator Ivor H.N. Evans (1886–1957) on Buffalo back. He collected thousands of objects for Taiping, Singapore and Cambridge Museums. Richard O.D. Noone, (deceased 1973) an ethnographer and later British Secret Services Officer working within Malayan jungles with aboriginal tribes. He sits astride an elephant on the cover page of his book *In Search Of The Dream People*; and finally Malvina Hoffman (1885–1960) mounting an elephant – artist and sculptress commissioned to produce *The Races of Mankind*, a collection of racial types displayed in The Field Museum, USA.

The objects on display are devoid of captions, the distance between 'original' context and current disposition emphasising the contingency of meaning. No longer the shadowless artefact illustrating collections histories, but material objects cut loose, and whose intentions are now our (the viewers') responsibility.

Din, Based On My Thoughts; With Some Notes To Erika Tan About The Non-Western Object Based On Our Conversations, c. 2008–13

Shabbir Hussain Mustafa

Mohammad Din Mohammad, *Pyramid of Souls*, pen on paper, 2001. Found on 26 August 2008, original archival image taken by author as he embarked on documenting the home and art of the late artist

Walking around a small–sized closed room of a recently deceased artist, with aging crème coloured walls, odorous with the tell-tale signs of an enclosing 'artistic space' of production, accumulations and thought, a helpful locus for the curator to solidify the concept. All seems well. Probing, a tracing is recovered from under the bed. On it, an assemblage is composed, proposing a union of various sculptures the artist had constructed over his now abruptly ended life. The assemblage is titled, 'Pyramid of Souls', attesting to that of a perfectly balanced votive stupa – an architectural system developed from the pre-Buddhist grave-mound, under which the saintly ascetic were buried, their bodies seated on the ground and covered with earth. The artist, however, resists using the term 'stupa', for he himself is declaredly a hybridised creature of European enlightenment thinking, and the term 'pyramid' shall suffice. The 'pyramid' is composed of sculptures assembled with coconuts, metal wire, *wayang kulit*, horse hairs, other salvaged ephemera, old computer tables, bones,

Below: Mohammad Din Mohammad, *Bermuka-muka* (two sided face), African masks purchased in Paris, 2001

Opposite: Mohammad Din Mohammad, Self-portrait, c.1998, at the artists' home in Clementi, Singapore

Opposite bottom: Mohammad Din Mohammad, A display about Malay traditional healing and remedies based on recent findings from Pahang, c.1980s, National Museum, Singapore

All images courtesy of Hamidah Jalil

coral, precious stones, wood and herbs. At the bottom, a statement is inked: 'Every soul will look for its true self despite the shapes and sizes assigned for its manifestation. Some will get lost along the way, and some will find their true self. As for me, the search and the pain is divine by itself.' The drawing is signed and dated – its authenticity remains intact. This 'pyramid' is an altogether radical tradition, and more radical with the stupa, as they work together with things, pictures, paint, nails – installatives of the artist. This is exactly not conceptual art. Even the references to its own visuality, the bits of monochromatic lines laid out in white space, the plangent glows of the stupa made up centrally by the *Alif*, a once deteriorating stump that has taken on form as sculpture, seekingly protect the trace away from the promise of the sign – witty denials of the conceptual; resisting the curatorial – but concomitantly asking for *my* embedding within his scheme. I cannot help but think the mystery of the sketch – if it was ever meant to enjoy the allegory of reading, or simply retained as a beckoning trace. For the artist, by then, had already become accustomed to repeatedly turning detritus into medicine and constantly provoking that we are already infected historically. I begin to sense a pulsating rhythm, my eyes pace around the room, at the pressing in pale walls, the door that holds them in opening and closing. This is too aphoristic; I must get back from this tracing to the room.

Din (1958–2006) was a central figure in the exhibition *Camping And Tramping* and continues to preoccupy the author as a critical artist who asked if indeed one can ever transcend the appearance of the exotic spectacle and what indeed are the potentials of the non-western object.

Note to Erika: Non-western objects, if positioned well enough, can open up insights into previously silenced cultures. But in order to do this, and as dangerous as this act may seem, one must first manipulate Western ideas about art practice and be prepared to bring certain objects out of their original functional contexts through an assertion of art.

Din's home was a critical site for his practice, where he and his wife artist Hamidah Jalil amassed hundreds of objects over three decades – as if forming a distinct allegory for island Southeast Asia that resides beyond what museological frameworks can ever aspire towards. Curatorially, objects from his collection, which interchangeably formed part of his traditional healing and art practice, were mobilised alongside objects from archetypal ethnographic institutions such as Raffles Museum and Library for *Camping And Tramping*.

Note to Erika: Non-western objects present an inherent difficulty if one makes a too clear and unsubstantiated claim that they are all 'spiritual'. But if one is to persevere with this claim, however dangerous this act may seem, it might be possible to gain a critical insight into the invention of 'difference' that one may consume, but perhaps never fully digest.

Din would constantly gather objects from different sources and origins, seeking representation and often producing ideographic pictures that formed diaristic gestures towards larger sculptural works, later deployed in gallery and museum contexts.

Note to Erika: Non-western objects are not linked because of their physical contiguity, but because they are brought into contact with an Other. The problem here is of nomenclature, where we should not simply assume that the problem will go away by a re-labelling, or some neutral terming such as 'non-western object', because this entire concern is no more than an invention of Western anthropology.

Knowledge systems and their access marked a significant point in Din's practice. Through his work, he would constantly question as to whether there is a place for highly specific and localised tendencies in the art of the postcolonial world and if indeed strategies may be developed to negotiate these sensitivities between the diverse material cultures of the contemporary world.

Note to Erika: Non-western objects do not appear as whole until they are unravelled under the modernist lens of fragmentation and thereafter, a drastic attempt to revitalise the cultural fragment through some sort of imaginative or aesthetic restructuring. Perhaps, some form of cannibalism should be initiated at this point; not as an attempt at creating conceptual art, but generating a substantive mode of working.

Ghost: (Re)Searching For The Doctor

Christina Chua

The rain announces its arrival with a heavy drum on the car rooftop. We pull up at the end of a sloping road and wipers clear our vision in slow-motion. The only indication that there is a home at the edge of this jungle is the square metre of a white lattice gate betraying itself through vines and cupping banana leaves. Upper Bukit Timah (North-West Singapore, home to Ivan Polunin[22]) heaves under the sigh of the downpour, the thick noise of which reaches us when the car doors open. I reach for the umbrella Mustafa hands me.

'To go fast is to forget fast,' I nodded to Jean-François Lyotard three years ago, believing the theory would do me good – or at least lend my amateur writing credence.[23] But I was then unawares that the most potent threat to memory would really be the monotonous habits for which the passing of time itself becomes insignificant. It was with these that I would too quickly forget this rain-blanketed encounter with an old man, his ceramics, and his film reels.

The doctor – for he was initially a medical doctor – was also a zoologist and biologist, an eclectic collector, a ethnographic scavenger of sorts, a documentary filmmaker and photographer. He was all of that, and the museum paid homage to him in due kind, with an exhibition eponymously titled *I Polunin*, and later with a selection of remnants, his film clips, scattered throughout *Camping And Tramping*.

He would go on to enter the official Singapore 'story' – though less a story than a rambling catalogue of things

historical (thus the persistent need for frameworks, quotation marks, museological retrospectives, etc.) – to be subsumed amongst the settling dust of the national archives. Polunin, the original and renegade archiver, had been tucked away in a methodical, all-too bureaucratic process that permits an echo such as his to resound, for a while, only for it to fade to silence.

So the 'I' that stressed his authoritative subjectivity, the curious eye of Polunin's camera, his keen mind, and his own consolidated self, was now slipping away. Perhaps I had wrongly assumed that the 'I' – his (retro) perspective, his work, and thus his selfhood – had been propped up by the same beams that held the museum body together. Then the exhibitions closed, the archive remained inaccessible, I lost him.

Still, there are some piecemeal flashes: the rain hovers still, some faded paintings hang over a staircase (a portrait of his wife?), wall text next to a three-minute video looping on a small monitor, a folio spilling out yellow documents on the floor of a whitened cube. But if anything, the man himself had passed in these three years to become a ghost, a spirit that visited me and the museum only once or twice.

With the invitation to write back to *Come Cannibalise Us, Why Don't You?*, that visitation – or only its very possibility – lingers again. It was Erika Tan's previous work *Persistent Visions* (2005), a three-screen video installation presented at the same time as *I Polunin*, that began a lengthy conversation between her and the latter, John Miksic's Sherd Library, the curators that juxtaposed these moving images, and then later, myself as an onlooker. What was I looking at, or in, again, where are the portraits over the staircase – simple, brown-eyed and straightforward?

At the time, Tan had excavated antique film clips from the Empire and Commonwealth Museum in Bristol (now defunct). She transposed and divorced them from their biographical content – mainly amateur footage of white expatriates visiting and living in various parts of Asia – to assemble these looping 'Visions' that could be seen face-to-face, or actually, floor to floor, with the concurrent Polunin show upstairs.

In retrospect, it occurs to me that her post-production could have posed a devious grin to the doctor's authorship, his contributions and first-hand documentation. But it did not, and the self-awareness with which Tan handled her constructed island of archive cinema was felt, as she simultaneously unravelled and bundled meanings. It was the same feeling – if I may imagine – of Polunin's own off-white shelves loaded and buckling under the weight of tapes, reels, stickers... Animating, then distending the gravity of so many memories.

This year, however, Tan's new exhibition reveals no overt traces of Polunin or his archive, no facile reference points to which I can surrender my search. Still murmuring within the walls of the museum were the imperatives of biographical origins (the echo of the 'I'), and Tan was uncomfortable. 'I felt I would either have to bend to him, or eradicate him from my view', she wrote to me in the margins as I drafted this essay. And so the artist chose neither extremity. The doctor had simply disappeared, and to me – this time round – it was already the second act.

After a two-year term of exhibition, when *Camping And Tramping* was dismantled, I felt all the more pressed to address this absence. And perhaps as a last-ditch effort, I found recourse in free association: looking at objects, at display configurations, framing devices that could only remind me of him. It was hardly the zealous or provocative, the cannibalising take-back, I admit; it was only scavenging.

Amidst *Come Cannibalise Us, Why Don't You?*, here were the diminished, but still somewhat prescient remains: a display of several totemic figurines of unknown origins with their backs turned to the observer. There are no placards to date or locate them, but only a singular, pregnant gesture – inverting (perverting, could it be?) the gaze of the fetish.

There is in their presence some uncanny resemblance to my own visions of the Jah Hut – Orang Asli tribesmen of about two thousand, as I imagined them through the pencilled, fading field notes of the doctor. Still, my impressions of this jungle diary, leafed through and filed away during my first stint as an archiver at the museum, are as fugitive as the material itself. Much

remained unsaid as Polunin's indigenous guides showed him the way through the rainforest, passing veiled superstitions about 'holes', 'swellings on trees', a 'bess' – homes not of men but of demons. His own writing was punctuated too frequently by ellipses, mysteries...

I had been humoured before by these writings, following his trail backwards, but now I am more circumspect. Knowing that the pieces left are very few, knowing that their rarity can inadvertently exoticise the archive, ghosting the person into an enigma – I am foiled.

Could it be, that this is what the ghost does? Were 'the bess', the holes and backs melding into Polunin himself, they and him both a grey mist descending in the forest, after the rainstorm?

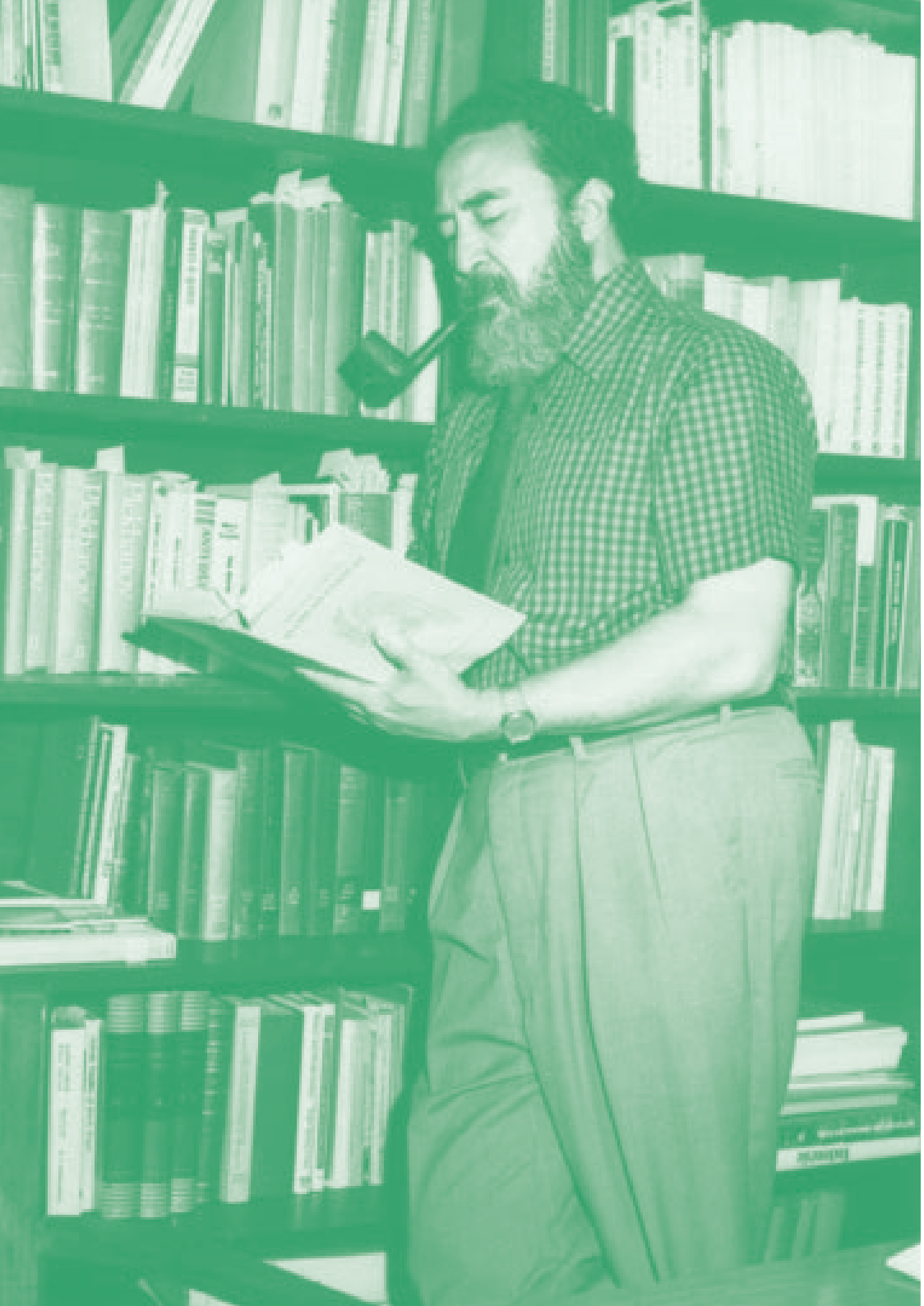
The Library Of The Possible

Masturah Alatas

I don't know who took this picture of my father, or when or where exactly it was taken. Most of the books don't have spine labels, so this leads me to assume that this is a shot of him in his study at home in Singapore.

I remember he would drive home from the university with the car stacked with books borrowed from the university library, and he would ask me to help him carry them to the study. I don't see enough of the room in the picture to recognise it as his study, though. The bookcase looks familiar, so does the desk though I don't remember it being in front of the bookcase. Is he at home? Then why is he wearing a shirt and tie and not a singlet and sarong? Had he just come back from work? Or was he about to leave for the university or a function? Did he put on a tie just for the shot? He hated wearing ties as he thought they were unsuitable for tropical climes. I cannot only rely on my flaying memory to tell a completely accurate story about this picture.

Zooming in on the book titles, near where his right shoulder is leaning against the bookcase reveals familiar words in bold type on a plain background – The Myth of – most certainly *The Myth of the Lazy Native*, the book



Opposite: Syed Hussein Alatas in his study. Photographer/date unknown[24]

for which my father is most well-known published in 1977. Another work in front of his right knee whose title can be more clearly discerned – *Malays and Modernization* by Tham Seong Chee – was published the same year as *The Myth of the Lazy Native*. This confirms that the picture was definitely not taken before 1977. And if I am to consider my father's greying beard and his Longines wristwatch – a family gift for his fiftieth birthday – we can say with some certainty that the picture was taken on or after 17 September 1978.

It would have been so much easier if the photograph carried information about date, location and occasion for which it was taken. Easier, perhaps, but a lot less fun for I find it stimulating to apply a method to classify an archival photograph. And my method led me to a much more interesting question. I was looking at book titles to find a way to date the photograph. But what if I shifted my focus from my priorities to the priorities of the man in the photograph who was essentially doing the same thing I was doing: looking at books? What book was he reading? How did he view the books on his own bookshelf?

This photo says almost all there is to say about my father's book philosophy and his comparative approach to scholarship. Russian political theorist Plekhanov, German philosopher Karl Marx and Israeli sociologist S.N. Eisenstadt sit on the same shelf as the Holy Quran and *Revolusi Mental*, a book that my father critiqued in *The Myth of the Lazy Native*. The books are not arranged in any particular order. If they have strips of papers sticking out from them it means that my father had read them and used the strips to write down the passages that he wanted to quote in his own writing. My father did not like to underline books or dog-ear them.

The book he is reading is *The Mysticism of Hamzah Fansuri* (1970) by his brother Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas. Hamzah Fansuri was a 16th century Malay Sufi poet who was born in Siam and lived in North Sumatra. According to my uncle, Hamzah Fansuri must be regarded as the first man to write down in Malay the Sufi doctrines. The fact that Hamzah justifies that he chose to write the book in Malay so that those who did not understand Persian or Arabic could become well-versed in the

subject implies that before Hamzah wrote his book, all books on the subject were probably written in Arabic or Persian.

It is clear that my father was posing for the shot. His pipe is not lit (he never smoked around books) but it is in his mouth because he did not like to be photographed without his trademark object. He can't surely be really reading the book because he is not wearing his glasses. My father was longsighted. But if there is one book he would have chosen to pose with, I can understand why it would have been my uncle's book.

It was the first of its kind. Nobody had written about Hamzah Fansuri in such an original way before. Most of all, my uncle showed that Malay could be a philosophical and literary language to be reckoned with. Literature and philosophy could be written in Malay, and not just the languages traditionally associated with Islamic philosophy such as Arabic or Persian. One would have to look for other reasons beyond the Malay language itself to understand why a significant body of Malay literature to make its mark in the region did not develop over the centuries.

The Alatas brothers had both written original books. One was about Malay laziness and the other about the origins of Malay literature but both were written from the point of view of Malaysians and not British Orientalists. Yet, no book with a Dostoevskian title such as *The Brothers Alatas* has been written yet by any Malaysian. The idea of exploring the similarities and differences between the two Alatas brothers, their significance for Malaysian letters or even the peculiarity of why Alatas genitors have produced an offspring of scholars apparently isn't attractive enough to the Malaysian literary imagination.

There were other possible books that my father had imagined could be written: a historical sociology of imperialism tracing its comprehensive effects on Malaysia, an empirical study about mental captivity in Malaysia, a dystopian novel imagining what would happen if all Malay women suddenly became infertile and could not reproduce.

After my father retired from teaching and moved back to Malaysia, he spent years building his book collection from second hand bookstores. The collection

grew and grew to the thousands, but obviously there was a limit to the possible number of books that could enter his personal library determined by the size of the large room in which he stored them.

My father's library of possibilities, limited in terms of the number of books it could hold, was disproportionate to the possibilities offered by the Library of Congress in Washington D. C. where he had borrowed about four hundred books in the course of nine months while writing his book on corruption in human society from ancient times to the present. Only with the Library of Congress, he had said, could he have written such a book.

After my father died I asked myself the opposite question: would it be possible to write a book with only the materials in his library? And the end result was *The Life in the Writing*, the first biography of Syed Hussein Alatas. I learned that any library, big or small, orderly or disorderly, can provide the source of interaction with its collection to elicit the creative impulse in the reader.

And should she be a scholar or a writer it could possibly result in another book for the library.

Re/Visiting, Re/Thinking, Re/Writing

Cannibalising History, Or The Un/Incorporation Of The Past

With the voices and articulations of others:
Lucy Davis, Amanda Heng, Ho Rui An, Ho Tzu Nyen,
Bruce Quek, Zai Kuning, Jennifer Lam KaYan, Lee Wen,
Lee Weng Choy, Charles Lim, Shubigi Rao, Adele Tan,
Eliza Tan, David Teh, Ming Wong, Robert Zhao

Kevin Chua & Erika Tan

Cannibalising History, Or The Un/Incorporation Of The Past

Kevin Chua & Erika Tan (with the voices and articulations of others)

TAN: There is no 'I' in 'our'.

TAN: 'our' + history = received narratives of origins, nationhood, hierarchies and power distribution. How far can the boundaries of 'our' be stretched?

'Our' history. One hears the phrase said all the time. Most often, one hears it in the national or ethnic registers; more recently, one finds it also applied to the world at large. We are in a time of total inclusion – or so it would seem, especially whenever someone pronounces the word 'globalization'. Interestingly, the term that seems to drop out is 'history', replaced by notions such as 'age' or 'era' – as in, 'our age of increasing globalization' or 'globalized world', but it's almost always somehow 'increasing' or 'increasingly'. Despite its commonality, the claims implied by 'ours' remain deeply problematic, not least because it assumes an 'our' that does not quite exist, an 'our' that belies a cover-up.[1]
Lee Weng Choy

CHUA: So the impulse for this section – consisting of a number of quotes selected by you, written by artists and critic-historians – is about various Singapore-based artists' approach to history, or better, 'the historical,' as I will call it – if 'history' refers to a more empirical, positivist approach to events and ideas in the past, 'the historical' asks of the conditions of such an empirical history, using a variety of methods and tactics to ascertain the hidden factors and confluences that allow that surface strata which we know as 'history' to emerge. In so doing, perhaps these artists exemplify the method of 'cannibalisation' at work in this exhibition – where cannibalisation is less errant rummaging than critical archaeology. Maybe they are your fellow travellers, Erika.

TAN: 'Fellow travellers'? Am I still searching for an 'our' in whose logic I might be included? Is the process of cannibalisation (used here), the disembodied quote, re-assembled to structurally perform a storytelling arc, more, a writing myself into history? – a process of auto-incorporation? The works and practices included here have a dual function. They map a refusal of sorts, often refusing 'history' as located in the past through a process of re-engagement; and secondly, in this act of re-engagement, there is a further challenge presented – that of the representation (repeated) and (re)interpretation of these works. What is operating here is a testing of aesthetic cannibalism within the field of contemporary art, less a question of 'whose shoulders can I stand on' than how are we mutually contaminated.

Lee Wen, *A.I.M. (Artists Investigating Monuments): Raffles Landing Site*, Singapore, June 2000.

AIM (Artists Investigating Monuments) Concept:

To build a scaffolding with a platform of equal height and as close as possible to the pedestal that the statue of Raffles is standing on.

Invite audiences and passers-by to go up to the platform and look at the statue of Raffles from the platform.

Take photographs and interview the audience who go up to the platform asking them the feeling of looking at Raffles from a different perspective.[2] *Lee Wen*

TAN: I am reminded of an image in the Singapore National Museum archives in which three young boys stare in 'awe' and 'wonder' at the museum's display of an elephant skeleton, eyes and necks craned upwards (circa 1950s). Unknown to me, both myself and the artist Matthew Ngui have approached this image in a similar way: cropping out the elephant skeleton, and pulling in to focus on the expressions and body language of the three boys. The physicality of looking at – the incomprehensible.

'Let us remember this Museum is designed to be no mere collection of rarities and curiosities, at which crowds may gaze in vacant and relentless astonishment.'[3]

AIM places the artist in a central position as that of the 'investigator' – the navigator or finder of truth… and it then takes the audience with it, but I wonder, empowering and novel as elevation may be, how much higher would the scaffolding need to be to re-calibrate that pointing gesture from one of 'awe' and 'wonder' (still) to an engagement of critical scrutiny (after all, Raffles is only another figure in the lineage of hierarchical power structures)?

CHUA: I think you're saying, Erika, that *AIM*'s attempt to see 'eye-to-eye' with (the statue of) Raffles both worked and didn't work; in a way we can never see eye-to-eye with Raffles, or any of our government leaders, despite the claim of democracy – because of institutionalised power, in-grained habits and customs, etc. I agree with that. But when I hear 'scaffolding,' I think of institutional support structures, the struts that hold up our society – be these grassroots community organisations, or government-run social programs (such as the CPF). In that sense, I don't think the scaffolding ever needs to fall – it is there to hold our society up. A counter-reading of AIM's project – which at its best is a critical de-pedestalisation of the monument – might therefore ask of the stability and sturdiness of the scaffolding that they used: how many people could it accommodate at one time, for the statue-viewing?

TAN: The one to one encounter, and eye contact with the 'Founding Father' of 'our' nation. Unlike the Tower of Babel, this scaffolding did not fall despite the institutionalisation of difference (starting with a colonial divide-and-rule and 'ending' with a modern multiracial society... where myths of the lazy natives still circulate, 'miscegenation' seems still an issue, and the fourth category of 'other' in Singapore's multiracial society is still seen as a 'minority' despite its growing numbers.)

We see Raffles everywhere. We have Raffles institution, Raffles Hotel, Raffles City, Raffles Place. We see his image in the textbooks, and we see his sculpture at the Singapore River. But we hear nothing of Sang Nila Utama.[4] *Ho Tzu Nyen*

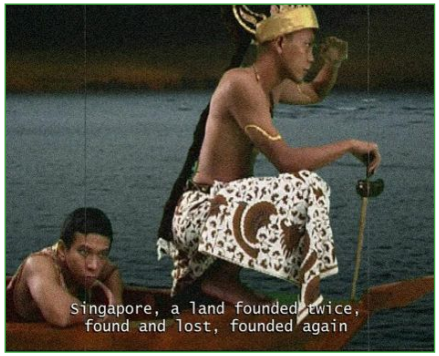
In Singaporean society today, the figure of Sang Nila Utama has been gradually erased from public consciousness and for many Singaporeans, history seems to begin only with the arrival of its British colonial 'founder' – Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, agent of the East India Company. The name of 'Raffles' is today used as a sign of class and prestige, just as image of Raffles has become inscribed into public memory, sculptures of Raffles have become landmarks in Singapore…

TAN: Not just an exercise in post-colonial replacement of one founding figure for another, but a question of retrieval from the lost archives.

…Raffles was a man of science, a herald of Western Rationality. This was the man responsible for plugging Singapore into the system of global capitalism. Utama on the other hand was the archaic, savage and mythic dimension of Singapore that had to be constantly suppressed. Modernism, in its official state version, has Raffles as its figurehead. It functions by eliminating all competing narratives which cannot fit into its paradigm. This is the reason why I think there is a remarkable silence over the name of Utama. I think of our representation as neither more of less valid than those of Raffles. They are simply alternatives, possibilities. I am not interested in trying to produce a 'just' image. I am just interested in producing images.[5]
Ho Tzu Nyen

CHUA: One difference between Ho's and *AIM*'s works, is that Ho attends to myth – myth as having its own specific function and temporality, myth as antithetical to history. When we think of myth we also tend to think of fiction, of belief rather than fact; but maybe in fully inhabiting myth we might expose the very fictiveness of 'fact' (and 'history'). In engaging with this more performative dimension of history, then, Ho's

Utama does resemble *AIM*'s Raffles Monument project – he is trying to have us see 'eye-to-eye' with the most established ('true') facts, to uncover the hidden forces that prop up – pedestalise – our most cherished beliefs.



Ho Tzu Nyen, *UTAMA – Every Name in History is I*, Video stills

Tan: who is imaging whom?

Utama – Every Name in History is I is, in some sense, an attempt to summon forth the 'ghost' of Utama as a way of putting pressure on the existing, dominant discourse of history. This 'return' to Utama is not one which brings us to a singular, essentialist, or unified point of origin. There has never been one Utama, but many – an ambiguous multiplicity of possible identities, and a mad proliferation of names. It is this very ambiguity at the heart of ontology which this project affirms – as a possibility of self-invention.[6] *Ho Tzu Nyen*

TAN: The martyr Ngah Ibrahim who within the colonial accounts is still part of the assassination plot that successfully killed J.W.W. Birch, Perak's first Resident... He was exiled by the British and was never given a pardon. His body, found in a burial ground in Singapore almost a century later, was given a hero's return (2006). A museum in Matang now marks the site of his final resting place. No photographs exist of Ngah; however, the image of him used in the museum is a photomontage of several different male relatives from the 1900s to today. From this, an image of Malaysia's early hero is complete. The image is presented not as a possibility or alternative, but as fact.

History will almost always be a triumphal account. To historicise is to create meaning and identity from the mute facticity of the universe and the 'national history' that emerges will usually be one that serves the political and economic imperatives of the nascent government. The originaries of the history of Singapore, in particular, have been shifting over the years in an almost arbitrary fashion. Official accounts of history are delving deeper into pre-Raffles Singapore, as if in eager anticipation of uncovering new mythical connections to explain the economic success of today. But whether Singapore emerged singularly from that sanctified landing site of Stamford Raffles or from more distant lands across the seas, it seems that a particular thread of communal history will be perpetually obscured. This obliterated historical space, often either mentioned as the pre-historical 'sleepy fishing village' or forgotten altogether, was occupied by the Orang Laut community. Perhaps they were far too nomadic for their tracks to be traced. But it is more plausible to conclude that they simply had no place within the scripted narrative of our national history.[7] *Ho Rui An*

TAN: And what place within the colonial hierarchy? ... a continuation of placing Orang Laut at the extremes of society, often seen as anarchic, and as pirates. A temperament that within colonial discourse needed to be tamed and controlled. Pirates and inter-Chinese Clan rivalries were often good excuses for further colonial encroachments.

CHUA: James C. Scott has done seminal work on some of these 'anarchic' communities in Southeast Asia; what interests me are modes of historical (or anthropological) writing that can adequately come to grips with social entities that fall outside the acceptable socio-political spectrum. It is as if the very act of writing entails a necessary erasure, a wiping out of the subjects the historian is purportedly documenting – which is why forms of art-making can potentially be more successful in responsibly engaging with these communities. Maybe then we can start coming to terms with the violence – the piracy – present in so much of the colonial archive.

The play *(The Epic Poem Of Malaya)* unfolds like a dramatised reading of a story put together by Zai Kuning based on his travels around the Riau Archipelago. It is accompanied by an evocative soundscape created and performed live by Zai himself. We hear the life story of a young Chinese man from mainland Singapore who marries into the Orang Laut community. We witness his initial culture shock, his attempts at assimilation, his discovery of his parentage (which reveals his birth mother as an Orang Laut) and eventually his transformation into the communal leader that defends his community. But the survival of his community is threatened by the shifting currents of social and political change. The various nationalist movements within the region and the subsequent demarcations of national territorial boundaries eventually led to the eviction of the Orang Lauts, also known as sea people, from the sea that is their home. Their crisis is existential: What does it mean to be an Orang Laut? Are we nothing more than 'sea monkeys' to be banished? Where is our place within this brave new world of nation-states?[8] *Ho Rui An*

TAN: Erasure: just as colonial knowledge production created new forms of knowledge, it did so at the expense of other forms of knowledge. Erasure is a formidable force that is still in operation. Pulau Sudong, once a populated island south of Singapore's main island, has been repurposed for military. The Singapore state; its multiple other islands are often forgotten. Except Sentosa (island of leisure – re-enacted histories and possible casino futures) and Pulau Ubin (a nature park with artist residencies), island cultures have been erased.

> The sea made Singapore, and made it what it is, determined its birth and its fortunes, and the nation's heavy economic reliance on trade and logistics is unlikely to change anytime soon.[9] *David Teh*

Charles Lim, *Sea State 2: Pulau Sajahat*, 2012[10]

CHUA: The paradox of islands is that they are both isolated and connected (with other islands or land masses). The island of Singapore dwells very much in this paradox. At times we play up our isolation (e.g. the rhetoric of Singapore as a geographical exception in the region), and at other times we stress our connection to other countries or cities (mostly when it comes to trade). Our existence as a nation is even premised on the fact that we cut ourselves off from Malaya in 1965. I'm interested in how this paradox manifests itself in history: what islands have we forgotten, or better, what islands do we *have to keep on* forgetting?

TAN: Charles uses the sea and maritime history to remind us of the fluidity and contingency of form. *The Riau Islands* brings us to the outer edges of 'our'-ness. In another of his works, a sea wall between Singapore and Malaysia is invoked. To this day, I am not sure if this wall does exist, but it is certainly very imaginable… and if not materially present, an invisible one exists all the same. This drawing of boundaries, re-inscribing the line that separates us and *them*, is the ultimate in contingent practices.

> …from the artist's [Charles Lim] ongoing exploration of Singapore's maritime geography and history. Issues of space and natural resources are especially fraught on this diminutive and densely populated island, whose landmass has grown by more than 30% since the 1960s. Singapore's history has been shaped at every turn by its maritime ecology and economy, and yet the sea has all but disappeared from the consciousness of its citizens. *SEA STATE 2: as evil disappears* uncovers the conditions that make this denial possible. Taking as its central metaphor an island erased by the state's prodigious land reclamation, the exhibition probes the tenuous psychology of the island republic, suggesting that what we try to keep out of sight is bound to come back to haunt us.[11] *David Teh*

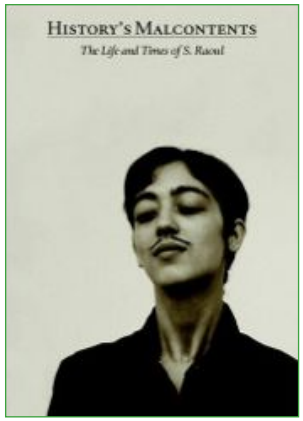
An islet named Pulau Sejahat, or 'Evil Island', once sat along the northeastern coastline of Singapore. According to folklore, a fierce battle broke out between the Acehnese and the Portuguese in the waters surrounding Pulau Sejahat in the eighteenth century. Despite the staggering size of the Sumatran Acehnese army, their arrows and spears were no match for the Portuguese guns and cannons. Defeated, the Acehnese commander fled to the shores of Pulau Sejahat with a few surviving men, only to find the island too small to hide on. Trapped on the island and surrounded by enemies, the Acehnese commander ordered a group suicide instead of succumbing to defeat. Legend has it that the warriors drew their kris (an asymmetrical dagger and a spiritual object) and drove them through their own hearts. The power from the kris transformed their souls into spirits that were bound to the island for all time. Sightings and supernatural encounters were frequent affairs after, and 'Evil Island' was thus named.

Today, Pulau Sejahat is no more. It has been consumed by the neighboring island Pulau Tekong through land reclamation works.[12] *Jennifer Lam Ka Yan*

> The most destructive act we can do is to destroy books… The Nazis destroyed books, the Library of Baghdad was obliterated, it has happened in Sarajevo.[13]

History's Malcontents: The Life and Times of S. Raoul is part biography, part reconstruction of the life and times of the erstwhile scientist, theorist, archaeologist and scapegoat S. Raoul, by his protégé and eventual biographer Shubigi Rao.

It concentrates on S. Raoul's work of the last ten years of his life, and is an attempt to capture the measure of the disregarded man through his work and letters.[14] *Shubigi Rao*



Shubigi Rao, portrait of S. Raoul[15]

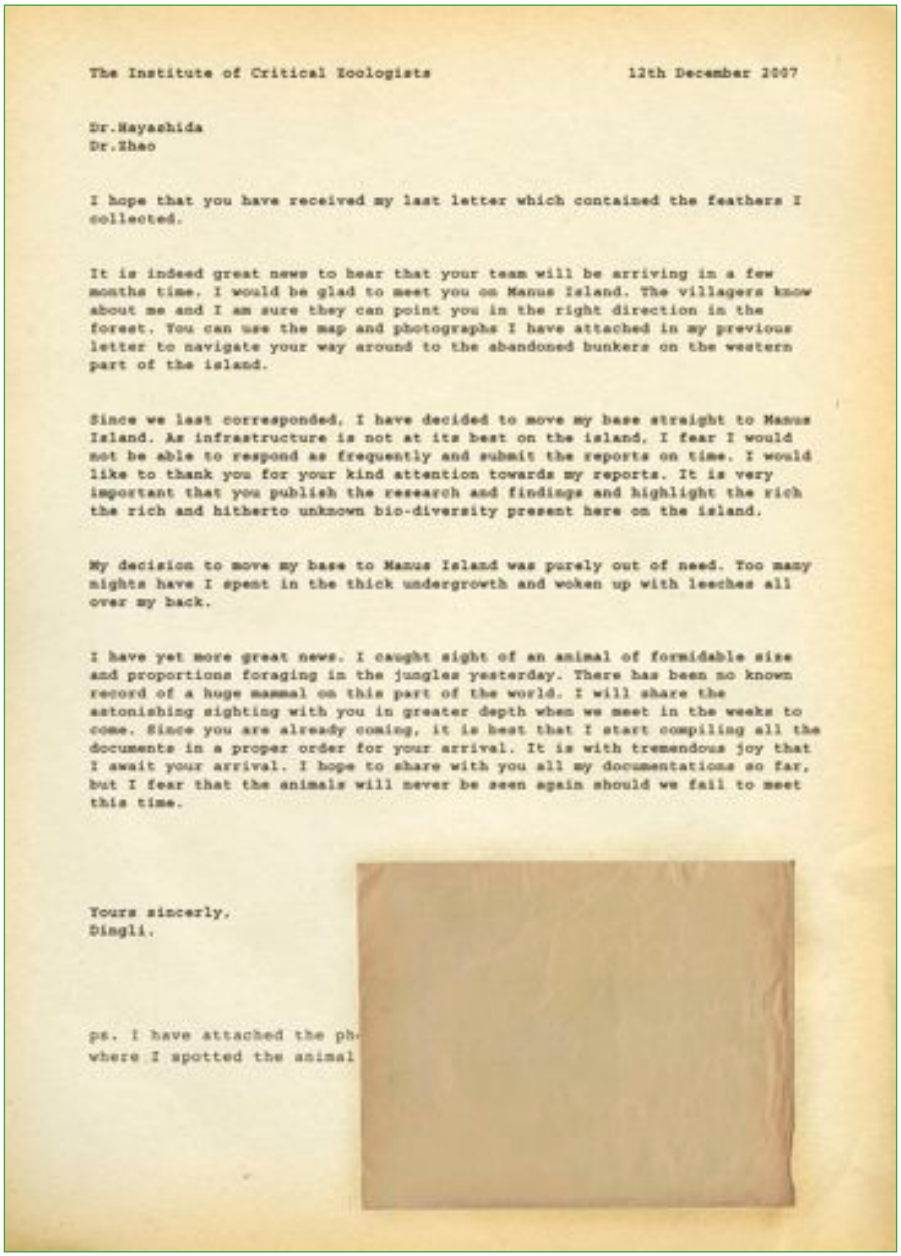
Shubigi Rao, *The River of Ink*[16]

S. Raoul was an incomprehensible archaeologist, scientist, and theorist, whose interests ranged from immortal jellyfish to the risks of brain damage posed by contemporary art. But Raoul tripped over an installation by artist Shubigi Rao and broke his neck, so it now falls on the latter to memorialise her one-time mentor.

Within the story woven for the show, Rao's *River Of Ink* might act as a point of contact between the twin identities of Shubigi Rao and S. Raoul. It's the supposed object of S. Raoul's untimely death, and at the same time, a collection of hand-drawn, hand-lettered books obliterated by a soak in fountain pen ink, a stark reflection of the violence that can be (and has been) done to knowledge.[17] *Bruce Quek*

TAN: Here the need to create a father/founding figure, only to then kill him off, works in parallel to the way Rao produces a series of meticulously made books, only to then destroy them. S. Raoul in return acknowledges and even 'produces' Rao. If it were not for him, she would not exist as the figure she is. If not for her and her production of books, Raoul would remain a disregarded figure, but still be alive. The complicated entanglement with history comes to the fore. What next for Rao (us?), post Raoul?

CHUA: One inevitably wonders if S. Raoul ever really existed – was he a creation of Shubigi Rao? The consonance of their names is the give away. But I agree with you that the interesting thing is what this means for the writing of, the possibility of writing, history. Is Rao's obsessive, painstaking reconstruction ironically more effective as history,



The Institute of Critical Zoologists 12th December 2007

Dr. Hayashida
Dr. Zhao

I hope that you have received my last letter which contained the feathers I collected.

It is indeed great news to hear that your team will be arriving in a few months time. I would be glad to meet you on Manus Island. The villagers know about me and I am sure they can point you in the right direction in the forest. You can use the map and photographs I have attached in my previous letter to navigate your way around to the abandoned bunkers on the western part of the island.

Since we last corresponded, I have decided to move my base straight to Manus Island. As infrastructure is not at its best on the island, I fear I would not be able to respond as frequently and submit the reports on time. I would like to thank you for your kind attention towards my reports. It is very important that you publish the research and findings and highlight the rich the rich and hitherto unknown bio-diversity present here on the island.

My decision to move my base to Manus Island was purely out of need. Too many nights have I spent in the thick undergrowth and woken up with leeches all over my back.

I have yet more great news. I caught sight of an animal of formidable size and proportions foraging in the jungles yesterday. There has been no known record of a huge mammal on this part of the world. I will share the astonishing sighting with you in greater depth when we meet in the weeks to come. Since you are already coming, it is best that I start compiling all the documents in a proper order for your arrival. It is with tremendous joy that I await your arrival. I hope to share with you all my documentations so far, but I fear that the animals will never be seen again should we fail to meet this time.

Yours sincerly,
Dingli.

ps. I have attached the ph
where I spotted the animal

Robert Zhao, *Letter 89 with photographs, Dr. Yong Ding Li, 12th December 2007*, Institute of Critical Zoologists

because it has been layered with fiction? Does it tell a deeper story, or grasp a deeper truth, better than any 'straight' factual history or autobiography can?

[Zhao] Renhui's work is based on the concept of doubt and uncertainty and in his work, he tests to the limit the principles behind the dissemination of knowledge and acceptance of truths. A large part of his practice tries to resist the false naturalisation of beliefs and circumstances.[18] *APT website*

I was an animal activist before I began working with the idea of using a fictional institution to develop my photographic work and interest in animals. It was over 6 years ago now when I began to realize I wanted to stop being so directly and personally involved when thinking about animals; I wanted to see if there was another other way to talk about them. It's the 'powers' that affect the way we relate to nature, such as science and religion – this is what I explore through the institution and my work.[19] *Zhao Renhui*

TAN: Perhaps the institution here replaces Rao's father figure. It is what gives substance to Zhao's work, which in turn undermines the authority structure of the institution itself. The historical development of institutions and their role within society, the knowledge they produce, the books that contain this knowledge are used as both props for authentication and staging of the works, but equally as a focus for our attention. The artworks, like *AIM*'s Raffles project, are the scaffolding which give us an alternative perspective.

CHUA: I find Rao's and Zhao's works similar, although I take your point about the replacement of the father figure (does an Author always keep reappearing in any and every archive, no matter how hard we try to suppress the figure? And what does that mean for the archive – is it ever neutral, or always a projection on the part of the historian/researcher?) For me, both their works are equally bound by institutions and discourse, and engage in fictive authoring to get at something deeper. Zhao, I think, pushes farther into the realm of fiction, in order to grasp the fictionality of science. But because his work walks a fine line between artifice and sheer believability, it risks descending into mere fiction. The danger is that his work ends up being a form of scientific relativism, in which nothing really matters, because everything is the same. The lesson may be of the historical: does Zhao believe in the utter sophistication of his own technique and method, the cruelty of his artifice? Do these fictive investigations, at some deep level, matter? Or are they, at the end of the day, an elaborate joke? I dare not ask.

TAN: Fiction within the archive seems an occupational hazard; the production of history seems ultimately to rely on a process of projection. In both Zhao's and Rao's work, an archival principle is at work, where the manufacturing of authenticity, provenance, and lineage produces a semblance of order out of chaos. Both works also deal with loss or absence – the key protagonist has always already disappeared, or left the scene, too remote to verify, retain, or interrogate. The 'mythical' Malay man, whose body was cast for a display piece in the Raffles Museum comes to mind. His existence now a footnote in an annual report, something most people will never chance upon. The body-cast either firmly tucked away in the recesses of NHB (National Heritage Board) stores, or dumped years ago. I looked hard for further traces… and in the meantime, can only imagine. Fiction is rife in the 'archive'.[21]

I like to create a context in which we can critically examine something. There are people who critically examine every form of knowledge and I think that is healthy. People are amused with the stories I come up with. But it's not as if this is about what I can come up with again and again to fool people. I do not mind if you think of it this way but you have to ask yourself eventually, of all the possible stories that I can tell, why do I choose to tell the stories I tell and not others? Do these stories capture your attention and belief? It's very important for me to say I work in fiction in a professional context. I am becoming more and more convinced, that certain things only appear in fiction. Fiction is the place where they can appear, not the historical world nor the scientific world.[20] *Zhao Renhui*

Lee Wen, *Give Peace A Chance Redux*, Sep.11 to 15, 2007

Working out of tradition, to take on the enduring legacy of predecessors, is to make new meaning out of what has historically been received and rested. We would conceivably be thinking that such a working method only behooves us to make art in accordance with the approved principles and spirit of the past work, but to boldly inhabit an entire form down to its distinctive details should cause us to think beyond the mere act of sycophancy. True, such blandishments do not serve to dislodge the certain position of the forerunner but they help us ask another question: why is a particular artwork of such significance to the latter-day artist that he/she might want to emulate it?[22] *Adele Tan*

Lee Wen, *Anthropometry Revision: Yellow Period (after Yves Klein)*, 13 April 2008, Cheng Du, China

Ming Wong, *Whodunnnit?*, Single channel video installation, promotional images, 2003/04

This work, *Anthropometry Revision* does not intend to re-enact Klein, hence becoming 'farce' in repeating history (sic. Marx). My intention is to continue a committed somatic discourse based on documentary evidences in the archive of art history and to interrogate a past performance work relevant to my own surveys and position.[23] *Lee Wen*

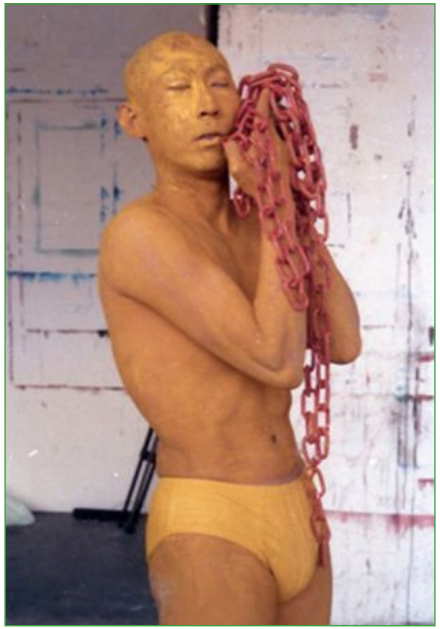
In Singapore there are four categories, CMIO – Chinese, Malay, Indian and Others – that were inherited from the British divide-and-rule concept whereby the colonial administrators divided the population into different enclaves in order to diffuse racial tension. And I think many people in Singapore still look at their identities through these narrow categories.[24] *Ming Wong*

TAN: How is change figured in history? If history is past, present, future and in a constant state of flux, temporally and syntactically, what then are the forces, which (ar)rest these movements? What acts against history's default state of contingency, instead fixing and determining its scope, meaning and process? The museum is a key site where time is artificially suspended, necessitating a performative approach to an engagement with it. Art history, too, is another narrative whose reception needs active and repeated readership. What does it mean, when *this* reader, *this* audience refuses the implicit assumptions of cultural homogeneity?

TAN: I am always amazed at how well the 'categories' seem to survive despite the way in which Singapore's population is changing. For both Ming and myself, we have both practiced in the UK where the terminology and policies around 'diversity' push artists into tightly woven scripts. The 'who' in *Whodunnit* is multiple: The actors, director, casting director, audience and of course the artist too… all bound up with the constant re-iteration (albeit in some cases changed) of difference.

For *Whodunnit?* in particular I was dealing with accents. In the work the actors' accents switch from classic Received Pronunciation – think 1930s BBC – which today is like a 'fake' English accent, to a fake foreign accent. The actors I worked with were mainly second- or third-generation British, so in order to do the foreign accents they either had to remember how their grandparents or parents spoke or just invent it. The Chinese actor, Jonathan Chan-Pensley, grew up first in South Africa and then moved to Essex. But as a professional actor he's always being asked to do roles as a Chinese-speaking waiter or gangster and he had to produce this fake Chinese accent based on American Hollywood films. The actor who filled the Middle Eastern category, William el-Ghadi, is of mixed Egyptian heritage and knows only a bit of Arabic, but during the time when we were working together it was post-9/11 and he was getting steady work playing bad guys with an Arabic accent. They were all professional British actors so they could all do great Shakespeare but they had to develop certain skills because of how they look. I think *Whodunnit?* exposes this situation and the mechanics of the popular-culture industry.[25] *Ming Wong*

CHUA: While both these works have something to do with performance, it's more interesting to think of history as performance. Lee Wen, for instance, was 're-enacting' several performance artworks of the past to reflexively ground himself in the present. Performance and strategic repetition was a way of 'testing' moments in the past, to see whether they would hold up in, or affirm something about, the present (as Adele Tan points out). If 'history' is the passive looking back towards the past, for me, 'the historical' is the active discovery of material traces in the present. Ming Wong can be said to have done the opposite of Lee Wen's performance in his work: instead of recollecting the past 'into' the present self, his work is a dispersal of the present self (let's call it the 'authentic Asian self') into a plurality of (past) global identities. Through the disjunctive uncanniness of these actors acting, pulling accents, engaging in mimicry, we get the sense that all accents are fake – performed and contingent. The more interesting question then becomes, why do we continue to believe in the inherent naturalness of 'true' accents? The question is also a historical one, in which performance is used to unbind a naturalised and normalised history.



Lee Wen, *Journey of a Yellow Man*,
Performance at City of London Polytechnic,
April 1992[26]

Lee Wen, *Journey of a Yellow Man No. 3: DESIRE*,
solo exhibition, installation, performance,
The Substation, Singapore 21–25 July 1993[27]

TAN: It is not co-incidental that Lee's first outing of the *Yellow Man* takes place in London, but, the continuation of this work within the Singapore context is what interests me. The historical precedent of racial classifications is important, but as Lee Weng Choy also mentions here, the issue of journeying is often overlooked. For me, the journeying is equally about time as it is about distance. Despite the time that has passed, the experiences undergone, the distances travelled, some ideas never cease to maintain some kind of power in our imaginations. How do we repatriate these thoughts, and ideas now so neatly propping up our current 21st-century multi-racial city-state existence?

The 'yellow man' has its historical references. For example going back to Carl Linnaeus (1707–78), the father of taxonomy is credited for the way we name, rank and classify living organisms. It was there that we could trace how Asians were first stereotyped as 'yellow'. The kind of stereotyping may have changed but it's still very evident and strong. But the work I do also has references to my personal history as well as social background. For example being an ethnic Chinese born in colonial Singapore and then growing up in the post-colonial republic. Trying to make sense of one's identity in a multi-cultural society upbeat in economic development and national identity building. And then there is the global cultural dimension. 'Outside' forces, which contribute to our perceptions either by way of imports like Hollywood and the Internet or one's own travels to the other places of differing cultures and history.[28] *Lee Wen*

…such titles, however, too often the attention is on terms like 'yellow man', and at the expense of those like 'journey'. But in Lee Wen's work, it is precisely through the process of 'journeying' that 'identity' is constructed and deconstructed.[29] *Lee Weng Choy*

Left: Bed samples for DNA testing
Right: Lucy Davis, Ranjang Jati: *The Teak Bed that Got Four Humans from Singapore to Travel to Muna Island Southeast Sulawesi and Back Again*, 2009–12

The buried bed curiously recalls a passage in Book 1 of Aristotle's Physics, which finds Aristotle contemplating the essence of things, by way of the argument put forth by the materialist philosopher Antiphon. If a man were to bury a bedstead in the ground, says Antiphon, and if the rotting wood were to take root and throw out a shoot, what we would find continuing to exist would not be a bedstead, but wood. The form, then, may undergo external transformations, but the matter endures as the intrinsic 'nature' or physis of the thing.[30] *Kevin Chua*

TAN: The 'historical' object is questioned here, its materiality, somehow being turned on its head. Read against the previous work and comments on journeying, the bed becomes wood, becomes data/information, becomes story. Here the genealogy of movement becomes the bed's function; it is the story 'it' tells which is important, rather than the object it is. And, to pull this story from the bed, it in fact necessitates the original object's physical transformation. There is always loss in re-purposing.

CHUA: Loss and gain, no?

In turning to DNA to geographically locate the source of the wood (of the Teak bed), the Migrant Ecologies Project was, in a way, returning to the *hyle* (matter) beneath the geographical circulations—the multiple endpoints or *teli*—of form. For there is a way in which we can think of DNA as the concrete expression of matter beneath surface form. Another way of saying this is that DNA is more materially 'real' than matter itself; the 'depths' of DNA relocate preformed matter as surface form. Embracing 'concerned explorers, curious collectors, daughters of woodcutters, miners of memories and art by nature,' the Migrant Ecologies Project asks questions about migration and ecology, but also traces a line between metamorphosis and transformation. As I shall argue, the Project provides us with more than just a mere biography, a mute catalogue, of objects. The real question, I think, is the politics that conditions the migration and transformation of these objects.[31] *Kevin Chua*

It has been said that Singapore lacks culture and passion, but not after you experience our *Worthy Tour* and appreciate the richness of this heritage that speaks of the spirit, courage, creativity and passion of our pioneers.[32] *Amanda Heng*

TAN: Yes, I suppose my use of the term 'loss' could imply a certain kind of nostalgia for something passed. But what I'm interested in, is the strategies for unleashing other readings and other meanings, purpose, value, existence. 'History' has a way of keeping us captive. How do we make history as a constant state of becoming?

TAN: The issue pointed out by Heng's *Worthy Tour* is the exportation of heritage. The lack of interest and support for 'local' heritage sees collections leaving the country and often going to China. One might offer a suggestion of 'going back' to China. Sojourners in life and after death, these collections are perhaps a form of ritual repatriation? Recent events in the museological and antiquities world have seen growing demands from China for the return of cultural artefacts.

Whilst the collections Heng references do not necessarily fit into this criterion, there is certainly a transnational movement. Read initially by myself as a pull backwards to a mythical 'origin'. I find it perhaps more interesting to contemplate its possibility as a push, or a shove, a forced 'return'. Is it possible to *repatriate an object with no shadow*?

CHUA: In a way Davis' and Heng's works are similar, in the way that objects or people travel, however fictitiously. Or better, because objects have a tangibility and concreteness, they have the potential to more powerfully reveal hidden narratives, or untie knots in historical narratives. Davis 'sends' her bed back to Muna, in a bid to recover the very distant origin of the source of the wood; while Heng tracks various works of art that have been sent back to the motherland of China. I wonder where to place *irony* in all this, that is manifestly there in their work: especially in my reading of Davis' piece, I make much of the fact that the bed wood was claimed to be, by some on the island, not from that island; while Heng gently parodies the Singapore Tourism Board's promotional language and rhetoric. Is irony a way for the reader/viewer to make sense of the narrative(s), to comprehend and thus move on, with the fixity (triumph) of resolution, or is irony a way to return us to the narrative, to keep us delving into it, however pleasantly or uncomfortably?

Playing on an ironic observation of tourism, cultural tours, and heritage trails as a major economic sector in modern Singapore, Heng's work re-visits personal archives and considers their cultural significance, acknowledging and commenting on the overlooked-authentic. Juxtaposing the dedication, spirit of belief and efforts of the individuals who cultivated and preserved such collections with differing responses of organisations and institutions, Heng questions the importance placed on them by society.

Heng's travel agency is an ingenious gesture that playfully questions the 'official culture' and explores how diverse cultural memories and identities can form a space for discussion and revelation. She shows how the process of creating a culture is always in a state of transformation. There is no rigid end point in this process, only in the need for historical continuity and the struggle to defend it.[33] *Eliza Tan*

Amanda Heng, *Worthy Tour*, promotional flyer

Amanda Heng, *Worthy Tour*, stills from video, from above left to right: The late Mr Low Chuck Tiew's Chinese Painting and Calligraphy of Ming & Qing Dynasty, now held in the Xubaizhai Collection of Chinese Painting and Calligraphy, Hong Kong. The late Mr Chua Boon Hean's Chinese film scripts of Shaw Brothers from 60s to 80s, now held in the Hong Kong Film Archives. Mr Tan Lai Hua's collections of folk and historical artefacts, now held in the Xiamen Chinese Overseas Museum. The late Mr Boh Chi Hee's Shui Mei bonsais, now on display in the Shanghai Botanical Gardens

CHUA: But Erika, is there something more to say – about *your* method as an artist? For example, what is the role of the resistance of the archive in all this, with all this 'cannibalising'? When does our body reject what we have eaten? I think the whole psychoanalytic notion of what is still being processed or 'worked through' by the culture or cultural unconscious is important; what happens for the historian/archive-delving artist when he/she encounters these knots, or unresolved moments in the past, moments that resist cannibalisation?

TAN: I think 'method' is an interesting point to end on. It presumes perhaps a consistency of approach, which I feel might not necessarily be apparent in my work, or indeed that important or useful to me. Faced with what I see as an un-nerving incorporation of 'past' ideological imperatives that produce a hegemonic museal discourse on history, perhaps the only way forward is a more piecemeal or fragmented, isolating of elements… a process of *divide and ru(le)minate!* The 'cannibalising aesthetic' in operation in the exhibition isn't a method as such, but a challenge. It's a challenge to the reader, the maker, the institution, the originators, and the protocols of working with cultural objects, both old and new. There is for me a conceptual challenge at stake and *perhaps* an ethical one too. The conceptual is located around extent and intention; the ethical seems at the moment for me, to be around *who*. The methodology, if there is one, is to unsettle the settled.

The reference to cannibalism in the project is one that acknowledges or depends on a duality of understanding, of both the *act* of cannibalism and the *mythology* of cannibalism within historical encounters with the Other. Citing the act produces an othering, which is then inscribed into social relations. Culturally, one might suggest that the very nature of a museum is already one of cannibalistic practices, where the material cultures of others are included (although not incorporated) and act as significant markers of difference, and of power/control over. Of course this reading can be upturned by other understandings of cannibalism which are less about consuming to have power over, but indeed are acts of consumption which indicate the desire to be, to incorporate oneself into the logic of the other. I think for myself, the hovering between these two polarities is the position I find of most use, a position of provisionality and indeterminacy, where re-use and appropriation are never fully un- or in-corporated (denial or Fredric Jameson's pastiche), but instead develops the grounds for a (self) reflexive resistance.

Finally, perhaps to create a repeat or loop within this intertextual work, I want to return to the mention of 'testing' *aesthetic cannibalism* as a mode of working in relation to contemporary art. Shifting from the inherited artefacts from *Camping And Tramping* to an authored edit of living, breathing artists, the once secondary challenge of ethics has risen to the fore. The resistance of the archive you ask about is for me, felt more strongly here in this interchange. The 'privilege' of distance, the already dislocated object, the muddied notions of ownership or maker in relation to the museum artefact are not available here to capitalise upon! These are not 'silent' objects to which performative roles should be given, but already articulations, with their own scripts. If anything, these scripts, collected here, form nascent libraries, or to rephrase Masturah Alatas in the text prior to ours, *libraries of the possible*.[34]

* CHUA & TAN would like to thank the artists for their generous permissions to re-use their images within the context of this discussion and for all the other articulations which have helped frame the intertextual exchange.

Notes

Artist Biography

Erika Tan's practice is primarily research-led and manifests in multiple formats. Recent research has focused on the postcolonial and transnational, working with archival artefacts, exhibition histories, received narratives, contested heritage, subjugated voices and the transnational movement of ideas, people and objects. Future projects point towards the digitisation of collective cultural memory and cloud architecture through the prism of ruins, hauntings, and mnemonic collapse.

Exhibitions include: *Film in Space,* Camden Arts Centre, UK, 2013; *Encounter, Experience and Environment*, Gilman Barracks, Singapore 2013; Samsung Art Prize, BFI, London 2013; *Sinopticon*, V&A, London / Plymouth College of Art, UK, 2012; *NO HAY CAMINO / There Is No Road, LABoral Centro de Arte y Creación Industria,* Spain 2008; *A Gift to Those Who Contemplate the Wonders of Cities and the Marvels of Travelling*, BankART Gallery, Yokohama, Japan & NGCA, Sunderland, 2008/2009; *Thermocline of Art – New Asian Waves, ZKM*, Germany, 2007; *Belief,* Singapore Biennale, 2006; *Around the World in 80 Days*, ICA / South London Gallery, 2006; *Incommunicado*, Hayward Gallery Touring Show, Sainsbury Centre, Manchester Corner House, City Gallery, Edinburgh, 2003; *Cities on the Move*, The Hayward Gallery, London 1999.

She has worked with numerous commissioning organisations such as Film & Video Umbrella, Picture This, BBC Radio London, Channel 4, EDSA Manila, Arts Council England and most recently is a recipient of the National Arts Council (Singapore) Arts Creation Award.

Erika was born in Singapore and received a B.A (Hons.) from Kings College, Cambridge. She is currently based in London and teaches in the faculty of Fine Art (4D Pathway) in Central Saint Martins School of Art, University of the Arts, London.

Contributors' Biographies

Masturah Alatas was born and raised in Singapore. She is the author of *The girl who made it snow in Singapore* (Ethos, 2008) and *The Life in the Writing* (Marshall Cavendish, 2010). She lives in Italy where she teaches English at the University of Macerata. She is currently working on a novel.

Christina Chua works at Ota Fine Arts, a contemporary art gallery at Gillman Barracks, and has contributed to editions of *Article, Singapore Architect* magazine and *Ceriph*. She worked closely with the curatorial team of NUS Museum for the exhibition *Camping and Tramping Through the Colonial Archive: The Museum in Malaya.*

Dr Kevin Chua writes and teaches on 18th and 19th-century European art and modern and contemporary Southeast Asian art at Texas Tech University, USA. He has a PhD in the History of Art from the University of California at Berkeley, USA, and has published in a wide variety of exhibition catalogues and journals, such as *Representations, Third Text, Art Journal, FOCAS: Forum on Contemporary Art and Society, and Broadsheet.*

Martin Constable is a freelance visual effects specialist. He has worked as advisor and facilitator with a number of visual artists in Southeast Asia including the filmmaker Charles Lim and the Singaporean art collective, Grieve Perspective.

Lucy Davis is visual artist, art writer and Assistant Professor at the School of Art Design and Media at Nanyang Technological University Singapore. She is founder of The Migrant Ecologies Project which 'embraces concerned explorers, curious collectors, daughters of woodcutters, miners of memories and art by nature. The project evolves through and around past and present movements and migrations of naturecultures in art and life in Southeast Asia'. www.migrantecologies.org

Grieve Perspective is an assembly of profoundly dark souls, whose mental recesses were moulded by their common experience in the art schools of the west and by their current residence in Singapore. Forever a work in progress, their enquiry is a piecemeal one driven by whatever catches their capricious eye. They are proud that their sum may not be greater than their parts.

Amanda Heng is an artist whose work is collaborative, multidisciplinary and often sited within the public realm. Other people are often central to her work, and art is operated as a tool for critical engagement with socio-political issues and their attendant collective memories. She was one of the founding members of Singapore's first artist-run space (Artists' Village, 1988) and she founded the country's first female artists collective (Women in the Arts Collective, 1999).

David A. Henkel has been curator for Island Southeast Asia at the Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore since 2002 and has also curated galleries at The Peranakan Museum. His research interest in the colonial museum spring from his work on the ethnological collections of the Raffles Library and Museum inherited by the ACM.

Mulaika Hijjas is from Kuala Lumpur. She holds a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship in the Department of South East Asia, SOAS, where her research focuses on women in the Malay manuscript tradition. Her book, *Victorious Wives: the Disguised Heroine in Nineteenth-Century Malay Syair*, was published in 2011.

Ho Tzu Nyen makes films, videos and theatrical performances. Solo exhibitions include: *MAM Project* #16 at the Mori Art Museum (2012), the Singapore Pavilion at the 54th Venice Biennale (2011) and *Earth at Artspace*, Sydney (2011). Other recent exhibitions include *Homeworks* 6, Beirut (2013); 5th Auckland Triennial (2013) and *No Country* at the Guggenheim Museum in New York (2013).

Nazrita Ibrahim is a Senior Lecturer in Universiti Tenaga Nasional (Malaysia). Her main research interest is Heritage Preservation using ICT (Virtual Heritage). She obtained her Bachelor degree in Computer Science from Trinity College Dublin (Ireland) and her Master degree in Computer Science from Universiti of Malaya (Malaysia).

Zai Kuning's practice spans poetry, theatre, dance, performance art, music, installation art, photography and film. A significant part of Zai's work engages with the history of Riau, and the stories of the orang laut, some of the earliest settlers along the coastal areas of Singapore and the Indonesian islands. His approach is both highly personal, and politically charged, with a focus on understanding changing environments, reclaiming and reconciling forgotten histories.

Charles Lim Yi Yong is a former professional sailor who represented Singapore in the 1996 Olympics and sailed in the 2007 America's Cup. His art practice has often combined his knowledge of the sea and his love for making images. His body of work titled *Sea State* has been an ongoing engagement and has been shown in Manifesta 7 (2008), Shanghai Biennale (2008), Singapore Biennale (2011). His film works have been screened at International Film Festival Rotterdam, Tribeca Film Festival, Edinburgh Film Festival, and 68th Venice Film Festival where he won a Special Mention.

Janice Loo interned on the exhibition, *Camping and Tramping Through the Colonial Archive: The Museum in Malaya* (NUS Museum). She graduated with a B.A. (Hons) in Southeast Asian Studies with a Second Major in History from the National University of Singapore, and is currently an Associate Librarian with the Lee Kong Chian Reference Library

Ahmad Bin Mashadi is Head of the National University of Singapore Museum. His curated exhibitions include *Seni: Art and the Contemporary* (2004), the Singapore participation for the Sao Paolo Biennial (2004) featuring Ho Tzu Nyen, *Telah Terbit (Out Now)* (2006), which explored the emergence of contemporary practices in Southeast Asia during the 1970s and Picturing Relations: *Simryn Gill* and *Tino Djumini* (2007).

Clement Onn is the Cross-Culture Curator at The Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM), Singapore. His research interests encompass inter-Asian (and further afield) artistic connections and in particu-

lar Christian art in Japan and China. He curated Hunters & Collectors (2009) and Devotion & Desire – *Cross-Cultural Art in Asia* (2013). He also co-curated *Ramayana Revisited* (2009) and *Congo River – Arts of Central Africa* (2010) in both ACM and the Peranakan Museum, Singapore.

S. Raoul was a mentor and patron of sorts to the younger Rao, who eventually became his biographer. He was much enamoured of her work as he felt sympathy with her more reactionary but ultimately futile politics, and even collected her *River of Ink* books. It was also what killed him. www.shubigi.com

Shabbir Hussain Mustafa is Curator at the National Gallery Singapore, where he researches on art from Singapore and Southeast Asia. He was formerly Curator at the NUS Museum, Singapore. Mustafa's curatorial approach has centred heavily on deploying archival texts as ploys in engaging different modes of thinking and writing. He curated *Camping and Tramping Through The Colonial Archive: The Museum in Malaya* (2011) and most recently *In Search of Raffles' Light / An Art Project with Charles Lim* (2013). He writes often, and is a member of the International Association of Art Critics, Singapore.

Adele Tan is an art historian, writer, curator and some-time artist. She received her PhD in art history from the Courtauld Institute of Art.

Fiona Tan's passion for historical research and interest in nature came together during her internship on *Camping and Tramping Through the Colonial Archive: The Museum in Malaya* (NUS Museum). Here she encountered the various animals which went through the hands of the colonial museum directors – stuffed, skinned, pickled and some even alive! She is presently an Assistant Archivist with the National Archives of Singapore.

Kenneth Tay is Assistant Curator at the NUS Museum in charge of the Ng Eng Teng Collection. He is interested in the intersections between the histories and theories of photography and the moving image, and how they may be mobilised to engage with the different ways of seeing at large.

Wenny Teo received a PhD in History of Art from University College London in 2011. Prior to joining The Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, as the Manuela and Iwan Wirth Lecturer in Modern and Contemporary Asian Art in 2012, she also worked in various curatorial roles at Tate Modern and at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Shanghai.

W. Patrick Wade is a Lecturer at the National University of Singapore in the Centre for English Language Education, where he teaches courses in photography studies, rhetorical criticism, and memory studies. His research primarily examines the role of public arts like photojournalism in processes of visual culture and rhetorical action.

Wen Lee has been exploring different strategies of time-based and performance art since 1989. His work is strongly motivated by social investigations as well as inner psychological directions using art to interrogate stereotypical perceptions of culture and society. His early practice was associated with Artists Village (Singapore). More recent initiatives and collaborations include: *Future of Imagination* (2003–), *R.I.T.E.S. – Rooted In The Ephemeral Speak* (2009–), and the *Independent Archive and Resource Centre* (2012–).

Lee Min Wong completed a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) Degree in History and Southeast Asian Studies, followed by a Master of Arts (History) Degree in the National University of Singapore (NUS). Her Master's thesis is titled *Negotiating Colonial Identities: Malaya in the British Empire Exhibition*, 1924–1925.

Ming Wong's practice seeks to refashion and re-contextualise the shifting nature of identity through the re-enactment of world cinema. Exhibitions include: *Meanwhile… Suddenly, and Then*, 12th Biennale de Lyon, France; *A Journal of the Plague Year. Fear, ghosts, rebels. SARS, Leslie and the Hong Kong story*, Para Site, Hong Kong (2013); *Ming Wong: Making Chinatown*, REDCAT, Los Angeles (2012). Wong was awarded Special Mention (Expanding Worlds) at the 53rd Venice Biennale in 2009.

Farouk Yahya completed his PhD at the School of Oriental & African Studies (SOAS), University of London, with a thesis on Malay illustrated magic and divination manuscripts. He is currently a Postdoctoral Research Associate in the Department of the History of Art and Archaeology at SOAS.

Robert Zhao Renhui is based in Singapore. His work addresses man's relationship with nature, paying close attention to how our attitudes and opinions shape our assumptions about the natural world. He works mainly with The Institute of Critical Zoologists and recently published, *A Guide to the Flora and Fauna of the world*; a series of original studies based principally upon the collections in the Museum and the research of the Institute.

List of Artworks

Approaches And Methods:
re/assemblage–re/creation–re/enactment–re/use–re/tell–re/sell–made possible through the technologies of dislocation inherent in museum and cinematic green screen technologies.

Video

Repatriating The Object With No Shadow: Along, Against, Within And Through p. 42–46
Medium: HVD Blu-Ray. Originating in multiple formats and codex
Duration: 36.46min
Editing: Erika Tan
Camera: Anthony Lam
With thanks to the British Museum, Raffles Bio-Diversity Museum, Taiping Museum, Matang Museum, Shabbir Hussain Mustafa, Anthony Lam, Heidi Tan, Michael Rogge

Vocationem Universalem / Universal Call pp.38–44
Medium: originating as a 3D Maya model, output as HDV, Blu-Ray
Duration: 13.30 min
Editing: Erika Tan
3D modelling: Irene Lema
Voice: David Smith

Mirage pp.108–9
Medium: originating as a 3D Maya model, output as HDV, Blu-Ray
Duration: 4.30min
Editing: Erika Tan
With thanks to Nazrita Ibrahim and colleagues at Universitii Tenaga Nasional Malaysia and the Preserving Malay Architectural Heritage Project

Curatorial Re/Assemblage

Ancestral Vitrine p. 33, 75, 124
A series of 'ancestors': Nias wooden figures, Black Madonna figure, orang utan (ape) skull, human cranium, Buddha figure, specimen jar, anthropological figures.

Founding Structures p. 64
2 mirrored A3 archival photographic images of Taiping Museum & Gaol circa late 1800s. Taiping Museum and Gaol were built 4 years apart, along with a series of other key Colonial institutions (railway stations, hospital, schools and gardens) in the years directly after British expansion into Peninsular Malaysia.

Colonial Exhibitions And Projections Of Empire p. 25, 36
A stack of 10 *Camping and Tramping* research binders, re-used to create a 'solid' body of knowledge. 'Colonial Exhibitions and Projections of Empire', at the top of the pile.

200 Milliseconds Of Malayan Light p. 28–9
Malaysia/Singapore Junks/Street Scenes/Buildings/Vintage 35mm Slides
Light-box displaying 200 eBay purchased slides. The assemblage forces visual tropes to the surface: landscapes, racial types, architecture, industry, fishing, Malay vernacular architecture, and a less common documentation of modernist churches.

Remnants From The Corner Of My Eye / a performance p. 34
The model Dayak House, shown in *Camping And Tramping* is shown with monkey skull, and located in green surrounds. There is a referencing back to the 1922 *Malaya-Borneo Exhibition* in Singapore where a reporter recounts witnessing *from the corner of his eye,* an encounter between Prince Edward, a group of Dayak Warriors, the ritual scalping of a monkey and the placing of its head within a Dayak House on display. This account has not been verified, but its source believes the Dayak House, now on display, is the very same one. This is shown alongside 3 acrylic slab grave works (*Material Resting Place*).

Tweedie's Desire
Tweedie's published drawing in *Display Of Stone Implements By The Use Of Mirrors* is shown elsewhere in the gallery, while a recreation of this display case is shown at the front end of the gallery, including 3 green 'stone' (Fimo) Adze heads. M.W.F. Tweedie was a curator and later the Director of Raffles Museum Singapore for over 35 years from 1932.

Central Acrylic Stacks p. 25–6, 35
An assembled display of collected artefacts from various museums and newer artist-made objects. Including: NUS Museum plaster-cast *Madonna & Child* (from MOMA gift shop), tortoise shell, Buddha heads; various Raffles Museum specimen collections – birds, butterflies, insects and shells; ACM photo album, knives, swords; *Camping And Tramping* research binders; turning displays unit with globe magnification and archival photographs, recreated Yam displays, green 'shadows' and green mounting material.

Flat Packed Elephants p. 24, 36
A series of collected photographs within a stack of Raffles Museum specimen boxes, including Elephant molar teeth. The images show examples of the domestication, and transnational movement and use of Asian Elephants; from scientific specimens (including completely flattened elephant skins), transportation, circus acts, infantilised and anthropomorphised beings, weapons of war etc.

Digital Repatriations

The Shadowless Object p. 25, 30, 31
Artefacts from the British Museum, digitally repatriated via their website, manifested in material form in the NUS Museum, Singapore.
Material: 14 x A5 size acrylic paintings on inkjet, mounted within Raffles Bio-Diversity specimen drawers. A5 is the size constraint placed on the British Museums' free-use digital web images. Growing numbers of museums are providing greater access to their collections and digital repatriation is a developing trend.
The original images © Trustees of the British Museum

A Thin Green Line p. 27
11 x A3 inkjet prints. Appropriated digital images from the internet of archival black and white mixed group portrait photographs. Slightly flying in the face of the more common racial divisions found in these formal group photographs. A thin green line encapsulates each original photograph.

Turning In Wonder p. 27, 34
A series of appropriated images of audiences in Raffles Museum looking at work (circa 1950s) placed upon turning display stands and magnified by glass domes. The turning works, spinning images, reflect and upturn surrounding images on walls whilst also magnifying and obscuring the images they sit upon.

Repatriating The Object With No Shadow: 16:0101010:S8 p.25
Originating on 16mm, converted to digital codex and streamed online, early film material is appropriated, and returned to Super 8 film. An edited version is then displayed on a hand cranked editor viewer.
Duration: approximately 1 minute but is dependant on the speed of each individual cranking the film.

Material Resting Place p.26, 32
A series of A5 Acrylic blocks with encased digital prints. The images are re-worked photographs of museum cist or slab grave artefacts. Cist graves in Malaysia are seen as the existence of pre-Malay and pre-Orang Asli cultures. There are a series of cist graves in store, on display and replicated through out South East Asia.

Malayan Postcards pp.101–2, 110–12
A series of 50 digital inkjet prints of 'Malayan' black and white postcards (backs and fronts), acquired from eBay. The scenic photographs are displayed upside down, with the postcard backs displaying texts from colonial writings referencing the 'kampong' or the 'Malay house' in hand writing.

Malaya
An mp3 sound work originating from the soundtrack of a film titled *Malaysia, Penang, Orang Asli* 1932.
Duration: 7min

Yams (where Bangladesh and Malaysia collide) p.16, 26
8 Jesmonite yam casts, reproduced from a sculpting of yams from Bangladesh in lieu of Malaysian yams, which are not sold in the UK. The yams are a re-created display of economic products exhibited at the *Malayan-Borneo Exhibition*, Singapore 1922.

Textual Highlights

Green
Throughout the book, and across the writing and collections of others, a series of green highlights have been added. They do not represent the emphasis of the original contributor, but my own underscoring of a parallel and personal reading.

Endnotes

Re|View

1 'Cannibal' derives from the Spanish *canibales,* which in turn stems from a Taino Indian word. Christopher Columbus, *Log of Christopher Columbus*, trans. Robert H. Fuson (Camden, ME: International Marine Publishing Company, 1987).
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18 Please refer to the ICOM (International Council of Museums) Code of Ethics for Museums, Clause 4.7 on reproductions, http://icom.museum/fileadmin/user_ upload/pdf/Codes/code_ ethics2013_eng.pdf, accessed December 2nd 2013. I must at this point say that I find the term 'fake' to be more fecund and suggestive than that of the correct and sensible words such 'replica', 'reconstruction' or 'reproduction', with the former ('fake') having the capacity to cause outrage and disruption by virtue of its connotations of deceit and deliberate deception. In addition, designating the artist's yam as 'fake' throws into relief the actual category of 'true' yams, so determined in common parlance because of the confusion surrounding the identification of actual yams.
19 J.C. Moulton's text is included in the 'interpretive booklet' featured in the exhibition, which the artist considers another work.
20 One such endeavor is the website *Multilingual Multiscript Plant Name Database* which has a page called 'Sorting Dioscorea Names' and features the listing of main yam species in languages from Burmese to Telugu. See http://www.plantnames.unimelb.edu.au/Sorting/Dioscorea.html, accessed December 2nd, 2013.
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Repetition, Rehearsal, Remake

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22 Dr. Ivan Polunin, a medical doctor, came to Singapore from England in 1948. He taught Social Medicine and Public Health at the then University of Malaya (currently National University of Singapore). In a fascinating career that began with the filmic documentation of tropical diseases as part of his medical research, Dr. Polunin subsequently took to filming with a 16mm cine camera. His extensive disease surveys of longhouse populations in Malaya, focusing on their behavioural patterns and way of life gradually grew to encompass hundreds of hours of film footage on Malaya's wide-ranging sociocultural practices, its rich biodiversity as well as its physical landscape. Some of these footages were later televised by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in the 1950s and also used in travel and wildlife documentaries produced jointly by Dr. Polunin and his friend Tony Beamish, then Director of Radio Singapore. – *I Polunin*, exhibition press release, NUS Museum, Singapore, August 2009 to January 2010.

23 'A Diary of the Archiver' was a brief personal essay I wrote as an undergraduate research intern at NUS Museum, contributing to the exhibition catalogue of *Camping and Tramping Through the Colonial Archive: The Museum in Malaya*. I was then tasked with cataloguing and digitalising the miscellaneous letters and documents of Dr. Ivan Polunin.

24 Image courtesy of Syed Farid Alatas © S.F.Alatas and Masturah Alatas, 2013.

Re/Visiting, Re/Thinking, Re/Writting

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16 *The River of Ink* (2008) emphasises the futility of preservation in the face of cultural genocide. By soaking a hundred hand-drawn and hand-lettered books in the same fountain-pen ink used to create the said drawing and lettering, the books undergo dissolution, some 'pulped' beyond salvage; they collapse under the weight of their own accumulation. Decaled letters come adrift in the bath, and stick to other books, some writing/drawing survives, and a lot disappears. The work takes its name from a survivor's account of the massacre at the Battle of Baghdad in 1258, and the destruction of the Grand Library, repository of the knowledge of the Islamic Renaissance, when the Mongol invaders threw all the precious manuscripts into the River Tigris. According to survivors, on the first day, the river ran red with blood, and on the second day it ran black with ink. Erika Tan, email correspondence with artist Shubigi Rao, December, 2013.

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21 I referred to this Malay body-cast in the video work: Repatriating The Object With No Shadow: Along, Against, Within and Through. Coming across it during my research, I lost, then found it again. I've found a few references to the original Annual Report; here is a quote from The Straits Times: 'The most notable addition to the ethnological collection, the one which decidedly drew most visitors and was always surrounded by crowds of fascinated natives, was the life-size model of a Malay, dressed in festive garments. A member of the Museum staff had bravely lent himself for the somewhat painful operation of having a cast taken, in plaster of paris, of his hands and feet, and the result was such a life-like figure, with baju sarong and kriss, that many of the more simple minded visitors could not be persuaded that it had not been prepared by the same process of skinning and stuffing, as the specimens in the animal gallery, certainly a flattering testimonial to the artist, Mr. Valentine Knight. It was his last large piece of work before his departure in May. It is intended to add casts of other Eastern races, as opportunity occurs.' – Dr. R. Hanitsch, Directors Annual Report For The Last Year, Raffles Museum & Library, *Straits Times* (Singapore), February 24th, 1912, p. 10.

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34 Rephrasing Masturah Alatas' text in this book: 'The Library of the possible'. See p. 133.

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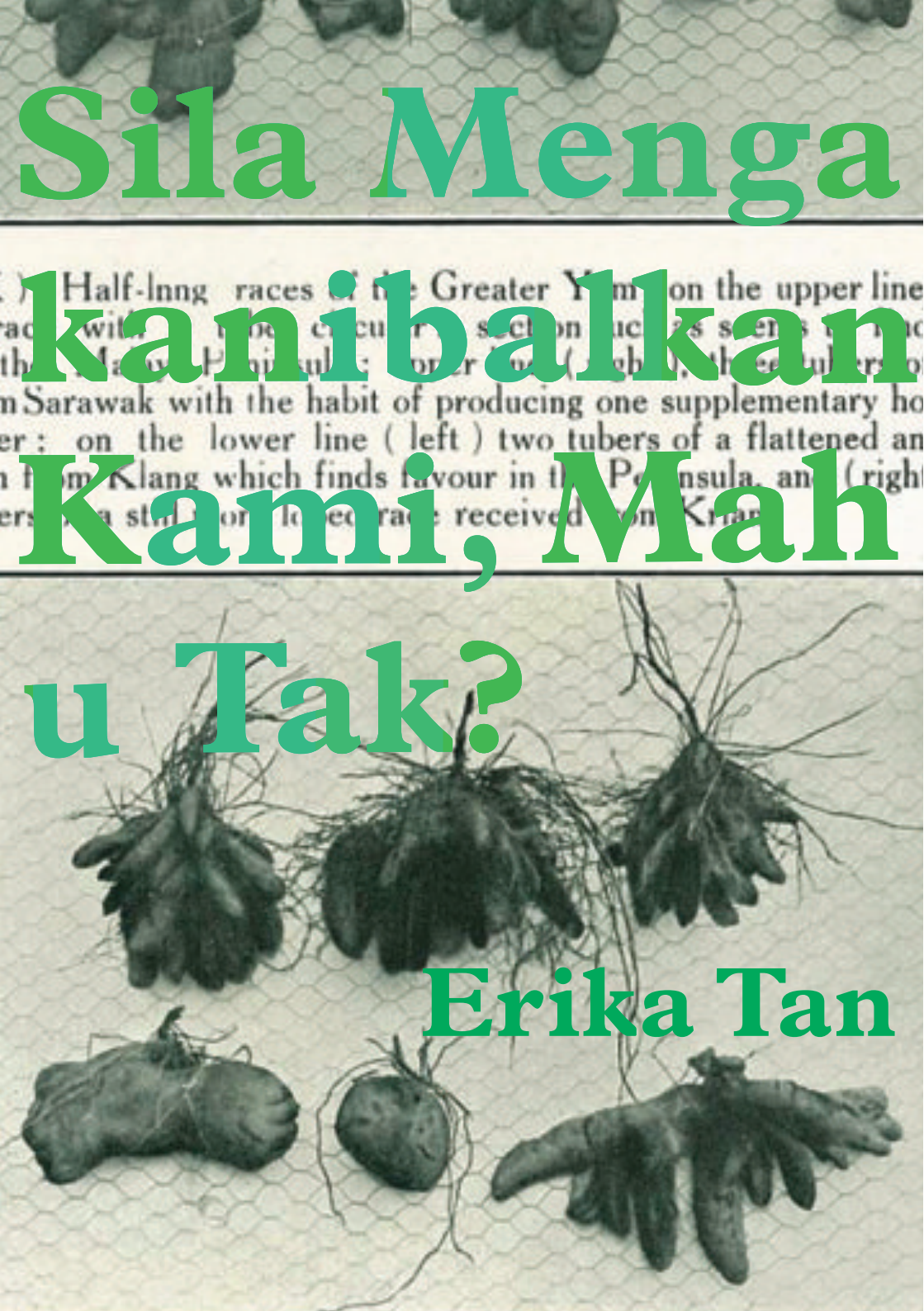

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