

PRESS RELEASE

Glossaries of the Straits Chinese Homemaking

Objects and identity

Singapore, Thursday, 14 February 2019 — Following eleven years of giving glimpses of a Peranakan family's domestic life in the early 20th century, NUS Baba House presents the exhibition *Glossaries of the Straits Chinese Homemaking*. The presentation is conceived to complement the interpretative displays in the first and second floors of the house, with objects and texts organised around aspects of the Straits Chinese material and social histories, and the contemporary perspectives that may complicate them.

The Baba House itself was established as a conservation project with the intention of mobilising research and study into a range of disciplines. Its partnership with The Peranakan Association of Singapore has since afforded the project a range of perspectives relating to the building's history, its environment, and the social network it sustained since the early 20th century.

As a heritage house presenting an example of an identifiably Peranakan home, artefacts that typify early 20th century Straits Chinese communities were included to fill the first two levels. However, these items may not necessarily have been part of the immediate history of the Wee family who historically lived there, and include donations from the collection of other families.



Image credit:
Chris Yap, *of cups and kueh part I* 2019. Image courtesy of artist.

In this vein, highlighted in *Glossaries* are the complexities that arise from interpreting objects as sites of continuing cultural negotiations. The exhibition brings together artefacts, artworks, video and audio records, and textual sources that examine the myriad ways in which “Peranakan” is constructed, encountered, and discussed.

Juxtapositions of items sourced from local dealer Guan Antiques, and selected articles from the existing Baba House collection, raise questions about the codified qualities that are thought to be immanent in constituting the Peranakan. Each object offers the space to be scrutinised independently, while simultaneously insisting on the task of speculating on the relational potentials they enact to one another and the House, as well as their association with the Peranakan culture.

To support these connections, elements are drawn from past projects developed by the House since 2007. Collectively, they offer insights and reflections into its programmes, curatorial interests, and the varied approaches associated with them. Featured are artist works from earlier exhibitions organised by the NUS Baba House, including ‘Objects & Desire (2007)’, ‘A Psychotaxonomy of Home: Michael Lee Hong Hwee (2008)’, and ‘Of Finger Bowls and Hankies: Chris Yap Voyeurs Through the Baba House (2009)’. Newly commissioned pieces include works by Chris Yap that emerged from his conversations with the dealer of Guan Antiques.

Another section of the exhibition explores 157 Neil Road as a historic residential site with displays of the finds from an archaeological excavation that took place before the house was restored in 2007. The assemblage of stratigraphic features, construction debris and remains from human activity reveal aspects of life in the social and cultural milieu of the late 19th and early 20th century. Video footages of the site prior to its transformation to NUS Baba House and an audio recording of the recollections of a former owner conjure a picture of the Wee family’s domestic environment.

Lastly, textual extracts drawn from the conferences organised by NUS Baba House, supplemented by primary sources, reflect the variety of thematic approaches in research on the Peranakan community present in the project.

Glossaries of the Straits Chinese Homemaking will be on display in the gallery space on level 3 of NUS Baba House until 2021.

For more information about the exhibition, media interviews, tours or high-resolution images, please contact:

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Annex A: About NUS Baba House

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Built around 1895, 157 Neil Road is a townhouse located in Singapore's historic district of Tanjong Pagar. Once the ancestral home of a Straits Chinese (Peranakan Chinese) family, the property was acquired by the National University of Singapore (NUS) in 2006 from funds donated by Ms Agnes Tan who made the donation in memory of her father, the late business and community leader Tun Tan Cheng Lock.

Following extensive restoration works, the premises officially opened on 4 September 2008 and was named 'Baba House'. It is a heritage house, curated to display the early 20th century domestic life and culture of the Peranakan Chinese. As a part of NUS, it is also a facility which supports research in cultural encounters and hybridity, urban and social history and architectural conservation.

NUS Baba House is an institution of NUS Centre For the Arts.

Annex B: About NUS Museum

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NUS Museum is a comprehensive museum for teaching and research. It focuses on Asian regional art and culture, and seeks to create an enriching experience through its collections and exhibitions.

The Museum has over 8,000 artefacts and artworks divided across four collections. The Lee Kong Chian Collection consists of a wide representation of Chinese materials from ancient to contemporary art; the South and Southeast Asian Collection holds a range of works from Indian classical sculptures to modern pieces; and the Ng Eng Teng Collection is a donation from the late Singapore sculptor and Cultural Medallion recipient. A fourth collection, the Straits Chinese Collection, is located at NUS Baba House

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Annex C: About NUS Centre For the Arts

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Established in 1993, NUS Centre For the Arts (CFA) is a vibrant space for the appreciation of the arts and nurturing of the creative and inquiring spirit. CFA supports student engagement with the arts and the integration of the arts into the life of the University.

CFA includes the NUS Museum, NUS Baba House and a Talent and Development arm that oversees 22 student arts excellence groups. Through our myriad of programmes, practices,

exhibitions, workshops and outreach, such as NUS Arts Festival and the ExxonMobil Campus Concerts, we enrich the university experience and contribute to the building of knowledge and transformation of students.

CFA also manages facilities such as the University Cultural Centre, with its 1700-seat Hall and 425-seat Theatre, and rehearsal spaces in Runme Shaw CFA Studios and University Town.