

## CHAIRMAN'S REVIEW



FY 2004 was a very good year for NHB. After overcoming the negative effects of SARS and the fear of terrorism in FY 2003, we broke all previous records in museum attendance and outreach. In addition, we received the wonderful news that the historic Supreme Court and City Hall would be converted into an art gallery. We have also made significant progress in cultural diplomacy with our regional neighbours.

### Record-breaking Museum Visitorship

*First,* | NHB's five museums enjoyed a combined visitorship of over 822,000 visitors. It was the best in our 12-year history, and a 70% increase from last year. This was achieved through an impressive programme of blockbuster exhibitions, innovative lifestyle-oriented events, and an aggressive marketing approach. I wish to record my gratitude to all the members of the NHB family for their ingenuity, hard work and dynamism.

14 major exhibitions were organised by our museums in the past year. The two most well-received were "Botero" by the Singapore Art Museum and "From the Land of the Ottoman Sultans" by the Asian Civilisations Museum (Empress Place). They attracted more than 70,000 visitors each. Other blockbusters included "Coffee or Tea?" by the Singapore Philatelic Museum, and ">38°C...remembering SARS" by the Singapore History Museum.

My ambition of attracting one million visitors to our museums is within sight.

### Outreach Activities Net More Than Two Million

*Second,* | our outreach efforts succeeded beyond our expectations. More than 2.1 million people participated in our extensive calendar of events and travelling exhibitions held at schools, shopping malls and public spaces. I am pleased to report that the inaugural Singapore HeritageFest 2004 attracted 620,000 visitors during the ten-day period. In addition, Project M, a pioneering initiative to develop youth audiences, attracted the participation of more than 170,000 youths over a nine-month period.

### Major Donations and Gifts

*Third,* | our generous donors and benefactors have continued to help NHB's efforts to increase the quantity and quality of its permanent collections and to stage outstanding exhibitions. I would like to single out, for special praise, Times Publishing, which donated 95 paintings by prominent Singaporean artists such as Cheong Soo Pieng, Choo Keng Kwang, Chua Mia Tee and Tay Bak Koi. Valued at more than S\$1.3 million, they represent the largest donation of artworks to SAM last year.

I would also like to thank our generous sponsors, such as:

- (i) Singapore Pools, whose partnership with NHB for the 'Scratchit!' game helped raise S\$800,000;
- (ii) NTUC Income, which raised S\$100,000 through their innovative 'Birthday Treats' programme;
- (iii) JP Morgan, for donating part of the proceeds from the JP Morgan Corporate Challenge Run 2004 in Singapore, US\$60,000 (S\$100,470) to upgrade ACM's ACE zones, and \$200,000 as part of an on-going pledged donation.

## Iconic Infrastructural Developments

*Fourth,* | we have a few exciting developments in the pipeline.

In November last year, we laid the Foundation Stone for the new National Museum of Singapore, heralding the start of another phase of development. When this museum re-opens, I am confident that Singaporeans will be delighted with the reincarnation of our oldest museum. It will be a jewel on Fort Canning. It will tell the history of Singapore with a combination of innovative perspectives and the use of the latest technology.

By 2007, the ACM on Armenian Street will be converted into a new museum showcasing the living culture of the Peranakans – the anchor attraction of a Peranakan zone on Armenian Street. With this new museum, we will have the space to showcase NHB's collection of over 5,500 Peranakan artefacts – one of the finest in Asia and the world. The Peranakan Museum will occupy unique niche in the world of museums.

Work at the historic Ford Factory building is also underway. When it opens in early 2006, it will include a public exhibition gallery chronicling the Japanese conquest of British Malaya and Singapore and its occupation of Singapore. A new archives repository built on the same site will also be opened in 2006.

Finally, City Hall and Supreme Court buildings will be converted into a new world-class art gallery by 2010. These beloved national monuments will provide adequate room to display our growing collection of over 6,500 artworks from Singapore and South-east Asia. They will also present international blockbusters from around the world. Situated strategically opposite the Esplanade, these buildings will become another cultural icon of Singapore.

## Entrenching Singapore in South-east Asia

*Fifth,* | we have made progress in our relationships with our neighbours in the region. I have led cultural missions to fellow ASEAN neighbours like Malaysia, the Philippines and Cambodia. Key developments include the October 2004

signing of an MOU with the Ayala Foundation in the Philippines. I intend to lead my NHB colleagues to all the other ASEAN countries, to pay our respects to our counterparts, to explore areas of cooperation and to consolidate our links to our neighbours. NHB also played host to the Meeting of the 6<sup>th</sup> ASEAN-COCI Sub-committee on Culture.

Our National Archives joined hands with the National Archives of Malaysia to put up a joint exhibition titled "Reminiscences of the Straits Settlements through Postcards". This has resulted in the publication of a beautiful book. It also co-curated with the National Archives of Thailand an exhibition "Ode to Friendship: Celebrating Thailand-Singapore Relations", highlighting the visits by Thai royalty to Singapore dating from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to the present day, to commemorate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of Thailand-Singapore bilateral relations and the first State Visit by the President of Singapore to Thailand. In addition, archivists and librarians from Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam and Bhutan attended training in paper conservation, archiving and records management at NAS.

Our Heritage Conservation Centre (HCC), in its various collaborations (Getty Conservation Institute, University of Melbourne and Netherlands Tropenmuseum), has extended assistance and advice on conservation to heritage institutions in the region. The HCC is gaining an international reputation for its excellent facilities and expertise in conservation. It has been very generous in sharing its expertise with our friends in the region. This is in line with our philosophy of making Singapore useful to our region.

## The Road Ahead

Looking ahead, NHB will develop strategies to promote a museum-going culture among Singaporeans and to attract a higher percentage of the tourists who visit Singapore to visit our museums. Greater emphasis will also be placed on promoting intangible heritage – our traditions, stories, and practices – through research, publication, education and outreach. We will also harness the power of digital technology to make heritage more accessible and appealing to the young. We will encourage and reward NHB colleagues to do research and publish. We must increase our intellectual capital because, at the end of the day, the reputation of a museum depends as much on the people who run it as on its collections. NHB's ambition is therefore to have world-class collections, exhibitions, infrastructure and staff.



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