



**Publication:** The Straits Times Life!

**Date:** Jan 17 2008

**Headline:** In vogue: Boutique museums

# In vogue: Boutique museums

**Four small arts and heritage spaces, two set up by individuals, slated to open soon**

**June Cheong**  
ARTS REPORTER

**B**USINESSMAN Oei Hong Leong and plastic surgeon Woffles Wu are in talks with the National Heritage Board (NHB) to set up private museums.

Mr Oei, 60, who was ranked the 29th richest person in Singapore by Forbes last year and has stakes in steel, health care and technology companies, will open a Museum of Buddhist Art, showcasing 40,000 to 50,000 Buddhist artefacts from his private collection.

NHB said the tycoon has agreed to invest between \$60 million and \$100 million in it.

The board is also working with Dr Wu, a collector of contemporary Chinese art, on establishing his own museum.

More details on the two museums will be released later, but such boutique museums seem to be in vogue this year.

At a lunch yesterday to give the media a glimpse of what to expect this year, NHB chief executive Michael Koh said that two other boutique spaces will open this year.

One is the world's first Peranakan Museum. It is located in Armenian Street, in what used to be the Asian Civilisations Museum, and will open at the end of April.

Then there is the edgy contemporary art gallery, 8Q sam, in Queen Street. Developed by the Singapore Art Museum, it is housed in the old Catholic High School and will serve as a platform for young artists to exhibit their work. It opens at the end of the year.

Mr Koh, 46, said of the new spaces: "There are many shows that we want to do. The will is

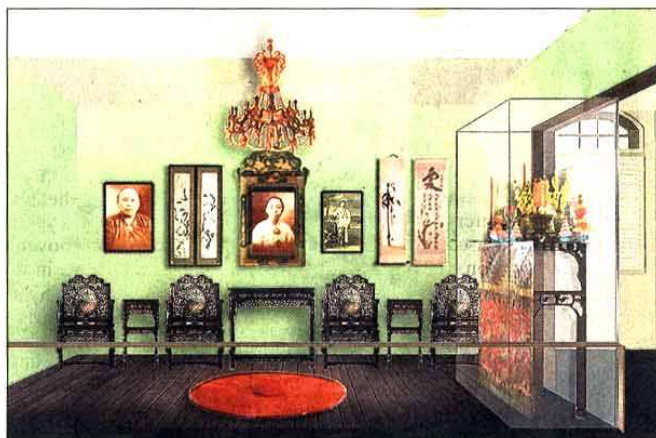


PHOTO: NATIONAL HERITAGE BOARD

**BABA CULTURE: An artist's impression of a display in the upcoming Peranakan Museum, the world's first, in Armenian Street.**

there but we need the space to do it."

Besides increasing its physical presence, NHB also plans to extend its reach among Singaporeans by targeting children and senior citizens.

NHB will tie up with community and grassroots groups like the Council For Third Age and the Singapore Action Group of Elders to encourage more senior citizens to visit museums. It will also actively recruit senior citizens as volunteers or museum guides. There will also be child-centred events like the upcoming interactive exhibition on Mozart and 18th-century Europe called Wolfgang Amade - A Perfectly Normal Wunderkind, in May.

Mr Koh said: "The silver-haired community may not have had opportunities to go to museums in the past. They can share these histories in more ways than one. And children are the next generation of museum-goers."

Asked if pitching shows to the masses may lead to the dumbing down of the presentation of Singapore's heritage, he said: "Whatever we do, we do it well and with intellectual rigour. It's about how you spin the story."

He added that NHB will not neglect its core group of museum-goers and will bring in a slate of blockbuster exhibitions this year.

These include the collaborative exhibition in April between the Singapore Art Museum and the Xu Beihong Museum in Beijing called Beihong In Nanyang. It will showcase the renowned artist's works depicting South-east Asia and India.

There is also Giacometti, an exhibition in May at the Singapore Art Museum of sculptures and lithographs by the Swiss sculptor.

Mr Koh beamed with pride when he related the story yesterday of a taxi driver who told him of the great time he had with his children at a museum recently.

He said: "The taxi driver said he realised he didn't need to take his children abroad to see such exhibitions. I would have made him our museums' ambassador among taxi drivers if I had remembered to take his name."

"You don't have to go to Switzerland to see Giacometti. You can just go to the Singapore Art Museum."

> [junec@sph.com.sg](mailto:junec@sph.com.sg)