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This year, local museums aim to attract atypical visitors with their programme line-up

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WHEN the National Heritage Board (NHB) tapped *Ah Beng* comedian Mark Lee to be the face of last year's Explore Singapore! 2007 campaign, it caused a mild stir.

"There were people who were afraid that we'd be lowering our standards of curation and that we shouldn't 'dumb down'. But on the other side, there were those who said it was great. The very fact that Mark was doing it was saying 'You, too, can come'," said NHB CEO Michael Koh.

In the end, they did. Lee's two brief stints as a tour guide at the National Museum of Singapore in December drew 400 people and had a waiting list of around 90. His other tour with taxi drivers at the Singapore Art Museum (SAM) was also well-attended.

It seems like the success of Lee's tours has encouraged more events for atypical museum-goers.

During yesterday's media luncheon, where the NHB gave a sneak peak into this year's slew of events, Koh announced new initiatives targeting families and the "silver-haired" members of the community. These include more child-friendly fare such as the National Museum's Children's Season events in May, and free tours for senior citizens at various museums.



GOING MASS: Feng Zhengjie's *Primary Colours* exhibit at the Singapore Art Museum kicks off the year-long China Festival.

Other highlights are the opening of the Peranakan Museum in April, and two big festivals focusing on Vietnam and China. Also announced were plans to develop a new art space, 8Q sam at Queen Street, which will be developed by the SAM as interim contemporary art galleries by year end.

Noting a rise in private collectors signifying their interest in developing private museums, Koh said the board is working with plastic surgeon Dr Woffles Wu and other notable private collectors.

While there are no definite plans yet to tap into Lee's celebrity friends to help chip in to broaden the nation's museum-going consciousness, Koh said they are keen for more volunteers.

"We're hoping that others will step forward. It increases that mind-share."

YOUR MUSEUM CHECKLIST

CHINA FESTIVAL

Various Venues
Jan to Dec

Back-to-back exhibits by modern and contemporary Chinese masters at SAM kick off the year-long festival beginning with *Primary Colours*, an exhibit by acclaimed artist Feng Zhengjie on Jan 29.

PERANAKAN MUSEUM

OPENING FESTIVAL
Peranakan Museum

April 26 to May 11 on weekends
Immerse in all things Peranakan when the museum finally opens on April 26 with cuisine, performances and games over the following two weekends.

VIETNAM FESTIVAL

Various Venues
April to Nov

Film buffs can check out 50 Years of Vietnam Film at the National Museum held in conjunction with the 21st Singapore International Film Festival. In May, expect an exhibit on the country's history and culture.

GIACOMETTI

Singapore Art Museum
May to June

Alberto Giacometti's stick-figure-like sculptures, lithographs and photos will showcase why this Swiss surrealist ranks up there with Picasso and Matisse in the history of European modernism.