

A Self-guided Journey

**NOT MERE
SPECTATORS**

**THE MAKINGS OF
MULTICULTURAL SINGAPORE**



FOUNDERS' MEMORIAL

Introduction and Foreword

Thank you for downloading this self-guided tour. This guide offers something different; it will take you through a series of reflections to answer the big question: Is a citizen born or made?

While the answer may seem self-evident at first, let's explore further. If you are with a friend, even better—thinking alone can be rather lonely—as it is great to have someone to bounce ideas off and to probe deeper.

About the Exhibition

The *Not Mere Spectators* exhibition explores the makings of multiculturalism in Singapore.

This exhibition will take you back to the 1950s to 1970s to explore how multiculturalism was thought about, talked about and consciously forged through policies, ground-up efforts and daily choices of ordinary people to become one united people.

It also challenges you to connect history to how we live today and to find your place in the ongoing makings of multicultural Singapore.



Artist's impression of the Founders' Memorial

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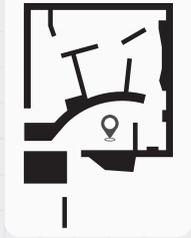
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Finding your way around

Use the map below to explore different sections of the exhibition. Engage with many stories and interactives in each section!

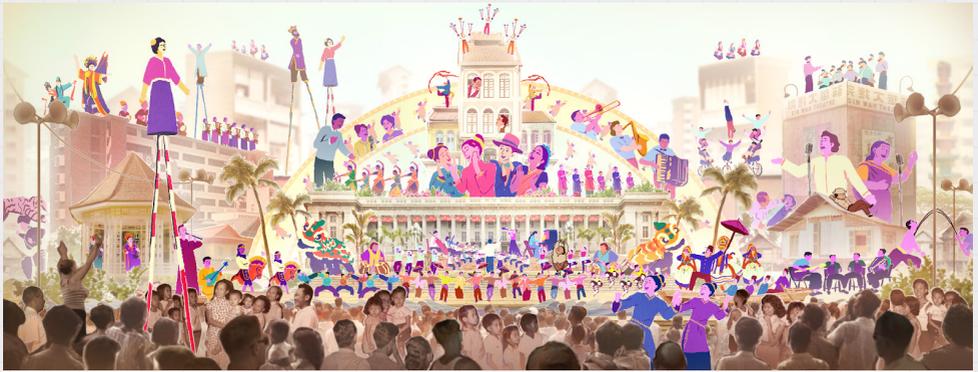


Gather: Aneka Ragam Ra'ayat (People's Cultural Concerts)



The year is 1959. Singapore has just gained self-government—not yet independent, but on the cusp of it. With a multiracial population, the new government needed to forge national unity.

One way to do this was through People's Cultural Concerts that brought everyone together to watch these performances and learn about each other's cultures (those were pre-Netflix days, after all).



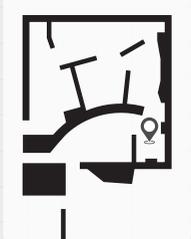
Watch the short film that reimagines the spirit of Aneka Ragam Ra'ayat.



Read the quote by Mr Lee Kuan Yew on the wall.

- What did Mr Lee mean by “not just mere spectators”?
- Why is it important for citizens to be participants rather than “mere spectators”?

Imagine: Meet Mr S. Rajaratnam

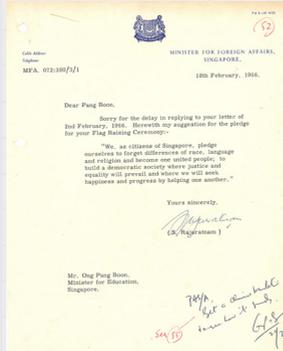


Mr S. Rajaratnam was one of the early thought leaders who played a pivotal role in determining the kind of society that he and the founding leaders wanted for Singapore.

Mr S. Rajaratnam was Singapore's first Minister of Culture. He championed multiculturalism and a shared national identity above communal interests. He also helped to craft the words of our National Pledge that reflect the promise we make as citizens.



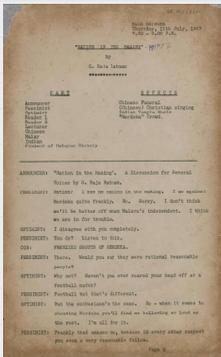
See if you can find the exchange between him and Mr Ong Pang Boon in this section about the Pledge. How is this similar or different to the final version of the Pledge that we recite in schools today?



Letters between Ong Pang Boon and S. Rajaratnam regarding the drafting of the National Pledge February 1966

Ministry of Education Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Mr Rajaratnam thought a lot about nationhood even before he went into politics. He wrote a play *A Nation in the Making* broadcast on Radio Malaya in 1957. The dream of multiculturalism, of a shared identity among different races had begun pre-independence in Malaya.



Browse the digital copy of his play and note ideas that are interesting to you.

Original typescripts of S. Rajaratnam's radio play, *A Nation in the Making* 1957

S. Rajaratnam Private Papers Collection, "A discussion for several voices by S. Rajaratnam", SR.091

Courtesy of ISEAS Library, ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore



Connect

Mr S. Rajaratnam's play *A Nation in the Making* inspired a Singapore playwright, Kaylene Tan, to develop an audioplay "*Becoming a Nation*" based on the themes of language, race and national consciousness.



AUDIO PLAY HIGHLIGHT: LANGUAGE

The first segment is on language.



Listen to the 2-minute play—the two characters Arumugam and his niece Selvi discuss having Malay as the National Language in 1959, at a time when Singapore was contemplating being a part of Malaya.

What concerns did they have? What opportunities did they see?

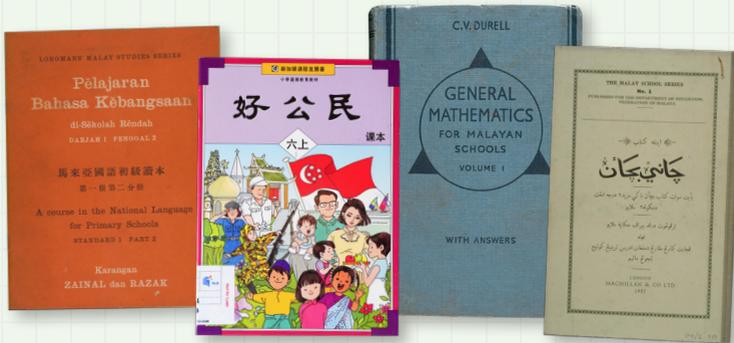


Take time to explore the contents of this section.

- Why was it important to have a common language?
- Why was English mandated as the main language of instruction in schools in the 1980s?
- What efforts were made to ensure preservation of the Mother Tongue languages?

SHOWCASE HIGHLIGHT

These learning materials reflect changes in our language policies from the 1960s to the 1980s.



Facsimiles of learning materials: *Pelajaran Bahasa Kebangsaan di-Sekolah Rendah* (1960), 《好公民》 六上 (1962), *General Mathematics for Malayan Schools, Volume 1* (1962), *The Malay School Series No. 1* (1957)

Courtesy of National Library Singapore and Collection of National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board



See if you can spot learning materials written in more than one language from the 1960s, reflecting the changes in language of instruction.

Can you see a learning material with Tamil typescript on its cover? Well, these were typewritten notes on the history of Malaya in Tamil, reflecting the dearth of teaching resources in vernacular languages as enrolment declined in these schools during the 1970s!

- How do changes in the learning materials and teaching resources reflect changes in society over time?

PAINTING HIGHLIGHT: *EATING ON BANANA LEAVES* BY CHUA MIA TEE



Eating on Banana Leaves
1979

Chua Mia Tee

Gift of Times Publishing Limited
Collection of National Gallery Singapore

Wander over to look at the painting *Eating on Banana Leaves* by Chua Mia Tee, a pioneer painter known for social realism.



Look at the painting closely.

- Who are the people eating together?
- What do their body language and facial expressions reflect about their relationship?
- How would they communicate with one another?



Think about it!

- Consider your daily experiences, is language something that connects and divides people?
- As you enter the “Relate” section, and look at the headlines around you. Just because we can use the same language for communication does it mean that we have achieved understanding of each other?
- Think about your social group—which languages do you use for communication?

Relate

This section is about how people relate to one another in a multiracial and multicultural context.



AUDIO PLAY HIGHLIGHT: RACE



Listen to the 2-minute play.

The protagonist Arumugam longs for a Malaya that looks beyond race. What were Arumugam's ideals and what were Boon Seng's concerns?

In the 1950s and 1960s, the government of the day had the challenge of bridging divides between races with different ways of life. Yet on the people-to-people level, there was evidence of strong ties.



Screenshots of the digital storybook



Explore the multimedia kiosks for stories on interracial adoption as well as how people looked out for one another regardless of race, even during the race riots of the 1960s.

There was also love across racial lines. However, interracial marriages faced opposition.

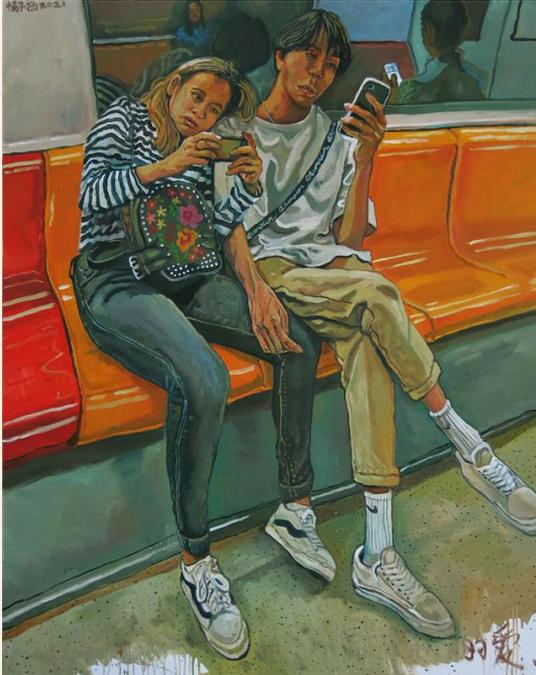


Read the stories in the multimedia kiosks.

- What issues were raised in these stories?
- Are they still relevant today?

PAINTING HIGHLIGHT: LOVERS ON A TRAIN BY YEO TZE YANG

The artist first captured a photo of a masked young couple on an MRT train, absorbed in their phones, during the pandemic. While recreating the photo as a painting, he had to imagine the couples' facial features behind their masks.



Lovers on a Train
2021
Yeo Tze Yang
On loan from Nic Lim



Have a look at the painting.

- If you were to see this couple on a train in real life, would you take a second look? Why?



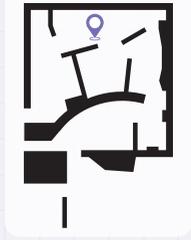
Think about it!

Look at the headlines above you in the “Relate” section. Which of these stand out to you as being the most concerning?

Reflect on your own personal relationships, are we *unbothered* by race, and should we be?

Live

You have come to the section that explores the common spaces where people live consciously as Singaporeans. People live, work, study and play side by side, sharing common experiences and interactions as Singaporeans.



AUDIO PLAY HIGHLIGHT: NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS



Listen to the last segment of the audio play. Arumugam and Rohani discuss the effort to raise money for building the National Theatre, a shared cultural space to forge a national consciousness.

If you recall, it was not always the case that people of all races could mingle together as we do today. In fact, during the days of colonial rule, races were segregated into different zones. Schools were also divided across language lines with English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil schools.

Think about the situation today. Instead of kampungs, most of us live in HDB flats. Almost all schools now use English as the main medium of instruction. We now have more opportunities to forge a national consciousness, though divides still remain.

PHOTO WALL HIGHLIGHT: SINGAPORE IDOLS BY JING QUEK



*Singapore Idols –
Army Boys
2006
Jing Quek*

On loan from Singapore Art Museum



*Singapore Idols –
Aunties & Uncles*
2009
Jing Quek

On loan from Singapore Art Museum



Look at these photos of Army Boys and Aunties and Uncles.

- What do you find relatable about the photos?
- Why do you think the photographer would consider them “Singapore Idols”?
- Would you have any memories or stories about our common spaces or shared experiences to share?



Head over to the Common Spaces photo booth and snap a picture of you and your friends in one of the common spaces you are most fond of!

The fact that we live, work and play together is no guarantee of deep interactions and understanding. In fact, sometimes proximity can bring friction, as seen in some of the headlines.

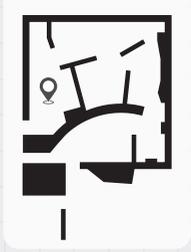
In our Pledge, the end goal is “to achieve happiness, prosperity and progress for our nation.” How can you help with this?



Think about it!

- What is one thing you can do to connect more deeply with neighbours and friends of different races?
- How can you be a force for good in your neighbourhood?

Move



In the early days of nationhood, our leaders clearly had the mission to forge Singapore as a nation, and to foster citizenship among a diverse group of people. The decision was made then to build a nation on the foundation of multiracialism and multiculturalism, something that still defines Singapore.



Dance Movement Challenge

You know the words of the Pledge, and you have recited it for many years. Now find a word or phrase from the Pledge that most resonates with you. Just as the exhibition started with *Aneka Ragam Ra'akyat* or People's Cultural Concerts, release the inner dancer in you and express that through a dance movement. Your moves matter!

We may not move the same, but we move together—everyone expressed their ideas differently but together they form a picture of people sharing a common ideal and participating in the making of Singapore.

Consider the quote by Mr S. Rajaratnam: “Being a Singaporean is not a matter of ancestry. It is conviction and choice.”

You are almost coming to the end of the **Big Question** journey.

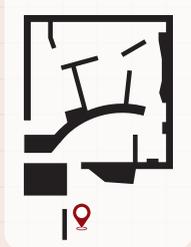
**So, are citizens
born or made?**

Singapore is a work in progress—you play a critical role in how the story of Singapore develops.



Before you leave, step outside to find out more about “Project Citizens: The First Million” to learn more about stories of the first million citizens of Singapore, the first to receive their pink identity cards.

Conclusion: Project Citizens Wall



Feel free to explore stories of the first Singaporean citizens.

If you were interviewed for SG100, what would your story be?



What did you think of the exhibition?
<https://go.gov.sg/notmere-bigquestion>



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