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MEDIA RELEASE

Hunters And Collectors Gather For Exhibition On The Asian Civilisations Museum's Southeast Asia Collection

[23 July 2009, SINGAPORE] A new exhibition at the Asian Civilisations Museum follows the exciting journeys of explorers and collectors who travelled in Southeast Asia from the late 19th century onwards. Featuring more than 300 artefacts, ***Hunters and Collectors: The Origins of the Southeast Asian Collection*** will be on show from **25 July to 21 September 2009**. The exhibition also features a recreation of Singapore's first museum – the Raffles Library & Museum – along with its cabinets of curiosities, rich ethnographic collection and natural history specimens.

The collectors featured in the exhibition 'hunted' down the objects that later found their way into the collection of the Raffles Library & Museum. This material was later inherited by the Asian Civilisations Museum when the Singapore national collection was devolved to start new national museums in the early 1990s.

"This exhibition gives us the opportunity to share a little bit of the history behind our collection and how artefacts come to be in museums' collections. The collectors featured in this exhibition enriched our Southeast Asia collection and helped make it what it is today. At the same time, their journeys have helped to further our understanding of the indigenous people of this region," said Dr Kenson Kwok, Director of the Asian Civilisations Museum.

The Early Collectors

The exhibition unfolds in two parts – the first focusing on collectors, their adventures, passions and personalities. Six independent collectors, ranging from explorers and naturalists to businessmen and missionaries, are highlighted.

“The collectors featured were selected to demonstrate the diverse backgrounds of individual collectors of the period. In Europe, there was a growing interest in societies beyond the Western world. Academic societies actively encouraged laymen to collect for the sake of science, share their research and donate their collections,” said Clement Onn, Assistant Curator at the Asian Civilisations Museum and curator of the exhibition.

Among them, William Louis Abbott (1860 – 1936) is considered one of the greatest naturalists of America. He travelled around the world collecting animal specimens and ethnographic objects, and gave them to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. His travels took him to East Africa, the Indian subcontinent and Madagascar before he arrived in Southeast Asia in 1896. During this period, he donated more than 6000 objects to the Smithsonian, more than any other individual donor. The Raffles Library & Museum was fortunate to receive part of his collection from the islands of Indonesia and Borneo. In particular, his collection of baskets from Borneo is particularly valuable as these weaving techniques have since become a dying art.

Other collectors, unlike Abbott, had not come to the region with collecting as a specific goal. Arthur Frederick Sharp (1866–1960) was possibly one of the most influential Anglican missionaries in Southeast Asia. He was Archdeacon of St. Thomas’ Cathedral in Sarawak, in Borneo where he served from 1897 to 1909. During his time in Sarawak, he formed a close bond with the Iban Dayak people. Unlike the other collectors featured in the exhibition, Sharp was not trying to build a personal collection. Rather, he was often given gifts in gratitude from the local community, which he would later sell or donate to the Raffles Library & Museum. One such artefact is a Dayak war-coat. Upon closer inspection, visitors will see that this unusual piece of armour is made of bark and fish scales.

A Museum Within A Museum – Recreation Of The Raffles Library & Museum

The second major section of the exhibition features another kind of collector – institutions such as museums. The exhibition re-creates a room of the old Raffles Library & Museum, inspired by archival images of the old museum galleries. Established in 1849, the Raffles Library & Museum began as a museum of natural history, founded primarily to study the exotic flora and fauna of the region. Over time, the museum’s collections expanded to include ethnology, the cross-cultural study of people and their material cultures. In addition, the museum began looking into the areas of archaeology, art and local history.

Displays in this section reflect the old Museum’s different areas of focus. Ethnographic materials on show include indigenous crafts such as a finely carved wooden gun powder flask from the Batak people and a model of a boat with rowers made from silver. Other displays show weaponry such as the traditional *keris*, spears and shields.

This section also highlights the old Museum’s natural history collection, on loan from the Raffles Museum of Biodiversity Research, NUS. These include specimens such as a Malayan tiger, a crocodile, a giant grouper and a leatherback turtle measuring nearly 2 metres in length. A long showcase featuring small mammals, birds and rare insects and colourful butterflies is a reminder to visitors of how the region’s rich natural history was displayed at the old Museum.

The exhibition ends with a comparison of the ACM’s current method of collecting and past collecting practices as represented by the personalities and artefacts featured in the exhibition.

“These early collectors travelled through Southeast Asia to learn about its peoples and cultures. In the same way, we hope that visitors approach the exhibition with a sense of adventure and curiosity as they uncover the richness of Southeast Asia’s

cultural and natural heritage. This time, visitors can expect to learn not only about the people of the region, but the animals too!" said Dr Kwok.

An Exhibition for Families – Interactive Fun For All

Designed as an exciting collector's tour through Southeast Asia, the exhibition features seven fun stations located throughout the exhibition. At these interactive stations, visitors can listen to the sounds of indigenous music, collect embossed imprints of tribal symbols and hunt for missing objects in the Virtual Raffles Library and Museum. Visitors can also pick up a free gallery guide to help them navigate the exhibition while keeping a lookout for interesting artefacts.

Public Programmes For Hunters and Collectors

The ACM will present a series of public programmes including a weekend festival, talks and guided tours, in conjunction with the exhibition. More information can be found in Annex B.

About the Exhibition

Hunters and Collectors: The Origins of the Southeast Asian Collection

寻宝者传奇：东南亚早期收藏

Date : 25 July to 21 September 2009
Opening Hours : 1pm – 7pm (Mon), 9am – 7pm (Tue – Sun), to 9pm on Fri
Venue : Special Exhibitions Gallery, Asian Civilisations Museum
Admission : \$5.00 per adult
\$2.50 for full-time students & senior citizens
Free admission for children aged 6 and below and senior citizens aged 60 years and above (applicable for locals and permanent residents only).

Admission includes entry to ACM permanent galleries.

Media Invitation

You and/or your representative are cordially invited to the Official Opening of
Hunters and Collectors: The Origins of the Southeast Asian Collection.

Guest-of-Honour : Mr Kwa Chong Guan
Chairman, National Archives of Singapore and last
Director of the old National Museum

Date : 24 July 2009 (Friday)
Time : 6.30pm (Proceedings begin at 7pm)
Venue : Asian Civilisations Museum
1 Empress Place, Singapore 179555

Please RSVP with Ms Jennifer Quong by 24 July 2009.

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About the Asian Civilisations Museum

The Asian Civilisations Museum's mission is to explore and present the cultures and civilisations of Asia, so as to promote awareness and appreciation of the ancestral cultures of Singaporeans and their links to Southeast Asia and the World. The Asian Civilisations Museum first began its operations at Armenian Street in 1997, which closed at end-2005, and re-opened on 25 April 2008 as the Peranakan Museum. The ACM's flagship at the historic Empress Place Building opened on 2 March 2003.

Address

1 Empress Place, Singapore 179555
Museum Front Desk : (65) 6332 7798
Public Programmes Hotline: (65) 6332 3284

Opening Hours

Mondays : 1pm – 7pm
Tuesdays – Sundays : 9am – 7pm (to 9pm on Fridays)

ANNEX A: IMAGES FROM THE EXHIBITION

High-resolution images available upon request.

Basket

Rattan and Bamboo
Used by Penang Keen Luga,
Dayak of Sempang, West Borneo
Gift of W.L. Abbott, 1 Jan 1907
Collection of Asian Civilisations
Museum



Armour

Probably Iban Dayak, Borneo
Acquired from Archdeacon Sharp
Collection of Asian Civilisations
Museum



Powder Flask

Laguboti Toba, Sumatra
Purchased from Mr. P. Pohlig, 1911
Length: 15.8 cm; Height: 7.2 cm
Collection of Asian Civilisations
Museum



Tiger

Southeast Asia
Collection of the Raffles Museum of
Biodiversity Research



Natural History Section in
recreation of old Raffles Library &
Museum



ANNEX B: Public Programmes in conjunction with *Hunters and Collectors*

OPEN HOUSE

The Lost World!

29 – 30 August 2009 | Saturday – Sunday

Programmes from 12.00pm – 5.00pm, free admission from 9.00am – 7.00pm

Travel back in time to a forgotten age when tigers and tribes roamed wild jungles! Bring your family down for an afternoon of thrilling traditional song and dance. Enter our special exhibition, *Hunters and Collectors* and watch as daring explorers from the past come alive and tell you their stories. Children will be transformed into little adventurers in our special kids' play zone - try out craft activities like finger-painting and sand art as a master story-teller recreates forgotten traditional folktales.

TALKS

Collective Consciousness: Feeling and Fieldwork

by Dr Nigel Barley, anthropologist and writer

15 August 2009 | Saturday | 2.00 – 3.30pm | Ngee Ann Auditorium

Free, no registration required.

A former curator from the British museum, Nigel Barley lightly reviews some of the odd relationships between collectors and their collections, ranging from Stamford Raffles in Java to the British navy in Africa and sets them within the framework of unresolved questions of what museums are for. He draws on his own experience of writing and fieldwork in Africa and Asia, both as a popular author and a museum anthropologist, to show some of the ways in which people and objects become fatally entangled.

An Orientalist's Treasure Trove

by Bonny Tan, Senior Reference Librarian, National Library Board.

20 August 2009 | Thursday | 7.30 – 9.00pm | Ngee Ann Auditorium

Free, no registration required.

Carl Alexander Gibson-Hill, as the last expatriate director of the Raffles/National Museum, straddled both the fading rule of the British colonials and a rising Malayan identity. His library of collected works reflects this rich heritage of Malaya past and the vibrant discourse surrounding its future, much of which Gibson-Hill himself had studied and written about. Totalling at least 1,000 items, Gibson-Hill's library includes some of the earliest published works which reference Malaya such as Linschoten's "Discourse" dated 1598. Spanning the late 16th century to the 1960s just before he died, the collection covers key subjects Gibson-Hill had been involved in as a curator such as ornithology, boats and ships, art and photography,

and early travelogues. The talk will peek inside these tomes and see if there is more to Gibson-Hill than we know.

Birth of a Museum

by Clement Onn, Assistant curator, Asian Civilisations Museum
12 September 2009 | Saturday | 2.00 – 3.30pm | Ngee Ann Auditorium
Free, no registration required.

Have you ever wondered how objects make their way into a museum's collections? Join Clement Onn, curator of the special exhibition "Hunters and Collectors" as he explores the glorious age of Discovery in the 15th and 16th century when collecting traditions began. The talk will also look at the differences between individual collecting and museum collecting in the late 19th to mid 20th centuries.

TOURS

Curator's tours

31 July, 4 September 2009 | Fridays | 7.30pm – 8.30pm
\$12 per participant. Limited to 15 participants per tour.

Join our curator, Clement Onn, as he takes you on an exciting collector's trail through early Southeast Asia. Discover the stories behind the artefacts while getting an insight into the origins of the ACM's Southeast Asia collection!

To register, log on to www.acm.org.sg

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