

Media Release

For immediate release



EXHIBITION OF OVER 80 WORKS SHEDS LIGHT ON THE SCULPTURAL TRADITIONS OF SINGAPORE'S NEIGHBOUR – THE BATAK PEOPLE OF NORTHERN SUMATRA

*Twenty works in wood, stone, and bronze have been donated to
the Asian Civilisations Museum*

Singapore, 2 December 2013 - The Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM) presents over 80 Batak sculptures in the exhibition *Beginning of the Becoming*. The objects in wood, stone,

and bronze will be on display at the museum from Friday, 6 December 2013, through 1 June 2014.

These extraordinary works of sculpture, which may appear whimsical and enigmatic, shed light on the intriguing culture of one of Singapore's neighbours – the Batak people of northern Sumatra. The exhibition will also help Singaporeans better understand their own close links to the Austronesian world. The Batak people began migrating to Southeast Asia from somewhere in southern China or Taiwan as far back as 6,000 years ago. The areas surrounding Lake Toba (and the island of Samosir in the lake) were the Batak cultural heartland. The Batak people were greatly feared by their coastal neighbours as headhunters and sorcerers, a reputation they cunningly cultivated to keep strangers away.

The title of the exhibition, *Beginning of the Becoming*, is a literal translation of the name of the Batak's supreme god, *Mula Jadi Na Bolon*, who they believed to be the creator of the universe. The exhibition explores Batak religion, architecture, and many other facets of their lives.

Most of the works in the exhibition are on loan from the Mandala Foundation, which has generously donated 20 objects to the Asian Civilisations Museum. These objects are on display alongside works already owned by the museum. The exhibition was organized by the Asian Civilisations Museum's curator for Island Southeast Asian art, David Henkel.

The objects on display represent the beauty and power of a people rich in artistic heritage. Highlights include a 17th-century sandstone seated male figure, a rare type of Batak sculpture. He sits in a pose that may have been inspired by Hindu-Buddhist sculptural traditions of neighbouring communities. Another key work is a medicine container made from a Chinese porcelain jar, and fitted with a specially carved wooden stopper.

According to the curator of the show, "Batak religion was a mix of animism and ancestor veneration and many of the objects in the show were carved for ritual purposes by specially trained priests known as *datu*. The priests carved their works to be ritually effective, but the ingenuity and imagination with which they were carved makes it clear that aesthetic values were also important."

Beginning of the Becoming: Batak Sculpture from Northern Sumatra was made possible by the generous loans of the Mandala Foundation dedicated towards creating cultural awareness of Southeast Asian communities. The foundation has donated 20 works to ACM's collection. Director of the ACM, Dr Alan Chong notes, "The gift of twenty important Batak sculptures to the Asian Civilisations Museum allows our audiences to fully appreciate the artistic and social heritage of a special culture that continues to live and flourish in northern Sumatra, a short distance from Singapore. These artworks were not produced in isolation, but show a dynamic exchange with Hindu-Buddhist art, Chinese trade porcelain, and other nearby cultures. We are very grateful for this wonderful gift."

Beginning of the Becoming: Batak Sculpture from Northern Sumatra will run from 6 Dec 2013 to 1 June 2014 at ACM Shaw Foyer (level 2). All visitors will enjoy free admission to the exhibition.

Programme highlights

About the Asian Civilisations Museum

The Asian Civilisations Museum is dedicated to exploring the rich artistic heritage of Asia, especially Singapore's ancestral cultures. Through a collection of works of art and a varied exhibition programme, we hope to deepen understanding of Southeast Asia, China, South Asia, West Asia, and the Peranakan world. Rare among museums in Asia, the ACM connects audiences with many cultures.

For media enquiries, kindly contact:

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About the exhibition

Beginning of the Becoming

Batak Sculpture from Northern Sumatra

Exhibition dates: 6 December 2013 – 1 June 2014

Venue: Shaw Foyer (level 2), Asian Civilisations Museum,
1 Empress Place, Singapore 179555

Website: www.acm.org.sg

Enquiries: 6332 7798 / nhb_acm_vs@nhb.gov.sg

Admission charges

Free for all visitors

Opening Hours

Monday to Sunday: 10am to 7pm; Friday: 10am to 9pm

Getting There

By MRT - Raffles Place

By Bus - 75, 100, 107, 130, 131, 167

By Car - Parking is available at Parliament House, Connaught Drive, The Fullerton Hotel, One Fullerton, and Six Battery Road