



PUBLISHED BY NUS MUSEUM FOR THE MIGRANT ECOLOGIES PROJECT



“WHEN YOU GET CLOSER TO THE HEART, YOU MAY FIND CRACKS...”



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STORIES OF WOOD BY THE MIGRANT ECOLOGIES PROJECT

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Photographed by Norman Ng.

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FOREWORD

BY **AHMAD MASHADI**
HEAD, NUS MUSEUM

Lucy Davis’s practice may be distinguished by a focus on human relationships with nature, in particular the complex links between capitalistic production and consumption and the environments that sustain them. Chief among her recent concerns are the origins and circulations of timber into Singapore, and ways we may render meaningful the many histories that collectively bind together the many lives involved, from its cultivation, harvesting, exportation, importation, to product making, their use and afterlife. Such labour for Davis conjoins “... politics, poetics, ecology and everyday stories”. While the beginnings of the project can be traced to her woodprint collage works produced two years earlier, an old bed frame she acquired from one of the used furniture shops in 2010 provided an impetus in mobilising a range of energies and their corresponding disciplines, a poetic marker that facilitated the simultaneous encounters between the materiality of the teak wood transformed into a utilitarian object, the object’s place and meaning in a changing social and economic landscape, and as someone drawn to the object, the artist’s status as a ‘migrant’ artist attempting to make sense of a practice that is shaped and defined by context and action. In other words, the wooden bed frame became a metaphor of multiple importance, where personal predicaments and idealism are set in relation to contemporary regard to change and development, and histories and sciences that informed them. In this regard, Davis undertook a number of interrelated tasks, among them; to uncover social histories of wood used for the bed frame aided by scientific methods of material

analysis and an anthropological turn in an artistic approach; to explore the cultural significance of wood in artistic expression, where medium and content combine to produce a vital interaction in which the very life force of the material marks its own agency. These were undertaken by way of personal, joint and collaborative investigations—initiated formally as Migrant Ecologies Project in 2010—bringing to light a matrix of findings and discoveries, direct and oblique in their relations, as factual residues and poetic echoes that interact to both clarify and obscure, often to efface the trained habit of judgement in favour of complexities that renders positions and perspectives provisional. The phrase “Migrant Ecologies” predicates this as a description of modalities of encounters and transformations. As pointed out by Jason Wee’s essay included in this publication, the term “Migrant ... describes the ecologies troubled and unmoored by our transactions and choices, transposed across geographical sites and regulatory boundaries wherever the consequences of those transactions and choices unfold. Ecologies are in motion, not just physical things, and they are colliding with, imposing on or are elided by other ecologies.”

The project and its aspects constantly evolved since 2009, taking on the form of research papers, filmic presentations and a series of exhibition projects in Singapore and abroad. One part of the exhibition on display at NUS Museum was presented at the Edinburgh International Science Festival 2013 entitled *Jalan Jati*

(*Teak Road*). Anchored to the question of origins, the presentation emphasized the act of tracing as lines that bifurcate and transact, “... *multiple arborealities* ... tracing an ecology of many-layered, contradictory, competing *rhizomes* of stories; stories about trees, stories about people and their relationship to trees and to wood, stories of what happens when fingerprints meet wood-grain, stories of ... plants, trees and forest materials ...” appropriating the service of humans in its propagation “... across continents ... [as] a combination of realist documentation and magic-realist fiction. The project is as interested in what one might call an ‘agency’ of nature; what nature does to us; what trees and forest materials inspire us to do, as much as what we do to nature.” Muna Island in Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia—the location from which the teak wood of the bed frame may have originated, based on early DNA analysis—reurs as a site where lines converge toward and subsequently emanate from, forming an interlacing of imaginaries and realities. Informing the curatorial consideration of the exhibition, the teak bed and the island conflate here not to infer the beginnings, but to offer a “glimpse” of the originary that may be, described by Kenneth Tay, experienced through “its sheer inaccessibility and undecidability”. The teak bed becomes a “primal scene of the exhibition, and that all other works which followed merely commentaries, footnotes and further speculations piling onto the spectral beginnings of the bed.”

The Museum wishes to thank artist and Assistant Professor Lucy Davis for this exhibition collaboration, working alongside the Museum’s curator Kenneth Tay and NUS student researcher Sandy Yeo. We also would like to acknowledge Shabbir Hussain Mustafa who had initiated conversations about this project. In developing this exhibition, the project’s research scope has expanded to include explorations into Sungei Kadut, an industrial area in Singapore specializing in wood, and its histories. The Museum is also grateful to Jason Wee, who has been specially invited to join the curatorial team for the exhibition.

BEGINNING AGAIN (FIRST CUT)

BY KENNETH TAY

Where do we begin with an exhibition? At the introductory wall text?
Its first letter? At the entrance into the gallery space?
Does the exhibition begin with the artist, the curator or the artwork?
Or has the exhibition already begun with other exhibitions and
gestures it references, however obliquely?

In thinking about this exhibition, I found myself returning repeatedly to the question of beginnings. Beginning again with beginnings. At its most elementary, the exhibition is the latest incarnation of six years of exploring and researching the various memories of wood around the region of Southeast Asia by the Migrant Ecologies Project. And this particular part of the project really only began when its founder—artist Lucy Davis—found a 1930s teak bed and attempted to trace its origins. By way of DNA Timber tracking technology, it was initially suggested that the wood came from Muna Island, Southeast Sulawesi. What followed soon after was a journey across the region in a bid to confirm the alleged origins of the wood from the teak bed. There, on the island, one of the two *dukuns*—wood spirit doctors—refused to acknowledge that the wood is from the area. In the process, what remains is a suspended question over the origins of the wood—a question which remains unresolved to the end.

But beginnings are, after all, always strange beginnings. There are no absolute beginnings—only strange originary middles. For something to make sense to us, it must necessarily refer back to existing situations or systems of knowledge. Today, literary scholars term this “intertextuality”, by which it is meant that every text is always already written by other existing texts, and that no text makes sense without other texts. In other words, we are always already speaking in other words. Yet, the larger import of such a thinking is that the origins of a text remains an undecidable

affair. Perhaps it is also in this sense that we might come to see that we are always already beginning *in media res*.¹

In the preface to his book *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (essentially a beginning before the beginning to a book on beginnings), Edward Said argued for a distinction to be made between beginnings and origins. For Said, the said origins of a text is necessarily of a passive and divine nature—and for which we might add: a transcendental cause. Beginnings for Said are less of a cause than an active event itself: a frame of reference one adds to or assumes of the text, which then opens up its own possibilities and horizons with the analysis of a given text.² Rather than remain chained to the idea of locating an originary cause for a given text, Said argues for beginnings as the effects of active interpretations. Yet, as helpful as Said’s account may seem initially, it runs the risk of being too hasty to disavow the question of origins in favour of what looks to be a hurried celebration of interpretive freedom. Instead, it is far more productive to hold on to the (im)possibility of ever knowing the origins of something. Beginning again from Sigmund Freud’s notion of the primal scene, Ned Lukacher proposes that the primal scene be thought more as “an intertextual event” that

comes to signify *an ontologically undecidable
intertextual event that is situated in the differential
spaces between historical memory and imaginative*

*construction, between archival verification and
interpretive free play* ... [It is] the interpretive impasse that arises when a reader has good reason to believe that the meaning of one text is historically dependent on the meaning of another text or on a previously unnoticed set of criteria, even though there is no conclusive evidential or archival means of establishing the case beyond a reasonable doubt.³

For Lukacher, the primal scene is less the imagined setting where a child witnesses his or her parents in a sexual act as proposed earlier by Freud (usually in the setting of a bed), but rather an interpretive event which allows one to catch a glimpse of a text’s origins only by way of experiencing its sheer inaccessibility and undecidability. And this is not limited to texts alone, but also in the texture woven around objects.

Returning to the scene of the exhibition, perhaps we might begin to see the teak bed as the primal scene of the exhibition, and that all other works which follow merely commentaries and further speculations on the spectral beginnings of the bed.

¹ See Chapter “The Beginning” in Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*, 3rd edition (Harlow: Pearson, 2004), p.1-8.
² Edward Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (New York: Basic Books, 1975), p.xi-xiii.

³ Ned Lukacher, *Primal Scenes: Literature, Philosophy, Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), p.24.

THINKING THE ECOLOGY IN MIGRANT ECOLOGIES

BY JASON WEE

Lucy Davis’s long-running project on wood as it is found, cut and used in Singapore and its neighbours is an assemblage of distinctly perspicuous yet interlocked investigations: the archival, that includes the compilation into a ‘white book’ of references and associated research material; the journalistic, in the form of a revealing interview with Allen Oei, a teak magnate; the scientific, by tracking the genographic movement of wood back to its territorial habitation; the photographic, with the inclusion of Shannon Castleman’s photographs of vernacular teak architecture, to name just four of these investigative developments.

A dense enmeshment of conferring yet separate practices, in a single unfolding of sustained artistic thinking, leads to challenging questions about the ways to understand what this thinking is, and how exactly this thought moves, navigates, uncovers. To say the project is layered may inaccurately suggest that some of these are deeper, more fundamental than the rest, or even simply older. The fragments of *jelutong* used in the woodblocks that intrigued Davis five years ago reappear in a material archive of wood samples that Davis recently located, as does the use of woodblock prints, for example. Layered also suggest the archeological, which, if anything, is but one of several ways of thinking wood that Davis employs.

We could begin with the conjunction of two nouns in the titular phrase, ‘migrant ecologies’ suggesting a material subject in

circulation within a given territory or economy, and the overlapping ecologies that hold that material as its axial constituent. Wood is Davis’ central pith, so to speak, and its ecologies ring expansively outwards from it. This reading emphasizes the migratory material in those ecologies, but a second reading is also possible, with a shift in our attentive pressure to the second term in that phrase. Migrant now describes the ecologies troubled and unmoored by our transactions and choices, transposed across geographical sites and regulatory boundaries wherever the consequences of those transactions and choices unfold. Ecologies are in motion, not just physical things, and they are colliding with, imposing on or are elided by other ecologies.

To give ecology its place in Davis’ thinking is not to say that Davis’ work is *about* ecology, or *about* the environment. Nor is it the same as the pursuit of ‘green’ activism, environmental or sustainable art, or any activity with an eco- prefix that holds nature and the environment as autonomous, already despoiled resources distinct from, even in antagonism with, urbanism or political economy. These activities run the danger of reifying earth, air, land and water as elemental materials of a originally ‘organic’ Nature separated from us by neglectful human effort, that art could somehow reconnect us with. The hardening of such a reification leaves no room for consideration of other materials and activities such as concrete, styrofoam, philosophy or museology that, with their

urbanistic associations, seem to fall outside of this ‘environment’ in dire need of our attention.

Instead, a reading of Davis’ project *as* ecology and not *about* ecology is to observe its dense mesh of investigative processes as the unfolding of ecological thinking. In his fecund works *Ecology without Nature* and *The Ecological Thought*, the literary critic and philosopher Timothy Morton writes of ecological thought as thinking other than ‘a picture of some bounded object or “restrictive economy,” a closed system. It is a vast, sprawling mesh of interconnection without a definite center or edge’.¹ Ecological thinking is expansive without necessary limits, taking on deforestation, illegal logging, and carbon footprints, but also furniture design, children, architecture, art, the relationships between humans and other animals, and those between humans and living nonhumans. Expansive openness perpetuates itself, openness begetting openness, making even more space for thinking and countering the risks of over-extension with an *ever*-extensive thought that joins up more and more dots. This extensive magnitude approaches the sublime, but the dots that ecological thinking enjoins reaches both ends of the scale. A tree, for Kant, measured against the height of a man, is in turn the measure for a mountain, that in turn is a measure for the earth, and in turn the planets, the solar system, the Milky Way.² With a touch of the accelerating universe, Davis’ project can continually expand—imbricate the project’s existing mesh of relationships

¹ Morton, Timothy. *The Ecological Thought*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010): 8.
² Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgment*. (South Australia: University of Adelaide, 2014). Ebook. Ch.1.26.

with 'freer trade' liberalizing economics, for example, or with the popularization of a 'Asian' design vocabulary based on wood-based materials and textures—without, at least in a lifetime, a foreseeable end.

No centre exists with such open thinking, only points and clusters, the singular authority of *the artist* displaced in favor of multiple authorship; the current manifestation of the project at NUS Museum acknowledges the contributions of Shannon Castleman, Allen and Simon Oei, Kee Ya Ting, Zai Kuning, Zai Tang and Davis, among others. Without a central position legitimizing every and any artistic gesture, there is consequently also no meta-position from which to make definitive pronouncements.³ Rather than a play for fuzzy ambiguity, Davis' project acknowledges a truism that bears restating, that sometimes simple solutions do not exist for complex problems.

This might sound like melancholy for some, but seen against the sunny, affirmative optimism of an Animal Planet documentary or the extroverted, forward-looking exhortations of contemporary environmentalism, her project avails to us the pleasure of other affects, in Morton's words, of 'negativity, introversion, mediation, irony, fragmentation', 'weakness and vulnerability'.⁴ This expanded affective range opens the possibility of affiliations between unanticipated peers and allies, even those deemed too ironic, wild or negative before. It also recognizes the polyphonic registers

³Morton, 17. Morton writes of the noir narrator, but it equally applies to the artist.
⁴Morton, 16. Also 145.

in any alliance-formations made in pursuit of a common cause; bluntly, even with the fortuitous accident of shared interests, any assembly will in each member *sound* different, that stratagems, messages, intensities will be multivalent.

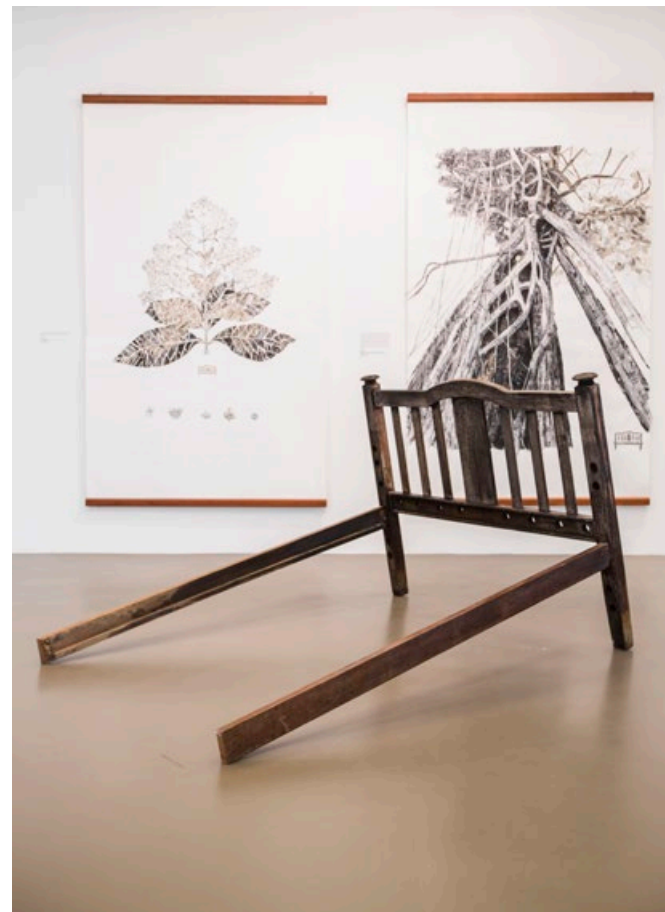
Abandoning the pursuit of a fixed target or reductive answers ('Earth Hour'), ecological thinking spreads open a welcome in any work on 'the environment' to art and artists, so that it is insufficient to consider art *about* the environment or ecology as environmentalist or ecological. Alive in this exhibition, more so than the prior presentations of this work, is the emphasis on woodblocks, the Singapore modern woodcut movement, and wood prints as co-participants in the effected environment, that these are substantial within the ecology Davis examines. Davis has laid out a field of practice, the metaphor of field especially deliberate here. It is a fertile, forested territory, but this territory isn't as simple as a geolocated 'Southeast Asia'. This is territory, to borrow the words of Elizabeth Grosz, 'not as the background or context for the eruption of sensory qualities, marks, significations'—it is not the land, the space or the environment on which actions happen—'it is the mark, sensations, qualities, that enable a territory to appear',⁵ that enable us to see what earth, or space, or environment, or ecology, is. With this iteration of the Migrant Ecologies project, we see a few things. Woodblock *is ecology*. The mesh *is* the environment.

⁵Grosz, Elizabeth. *Chaos, Territory, Art*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008). 48.

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PHOTOGRAPHS OF EXHIBITION INSTALLATION

All photographs in this section are by Norman Ng





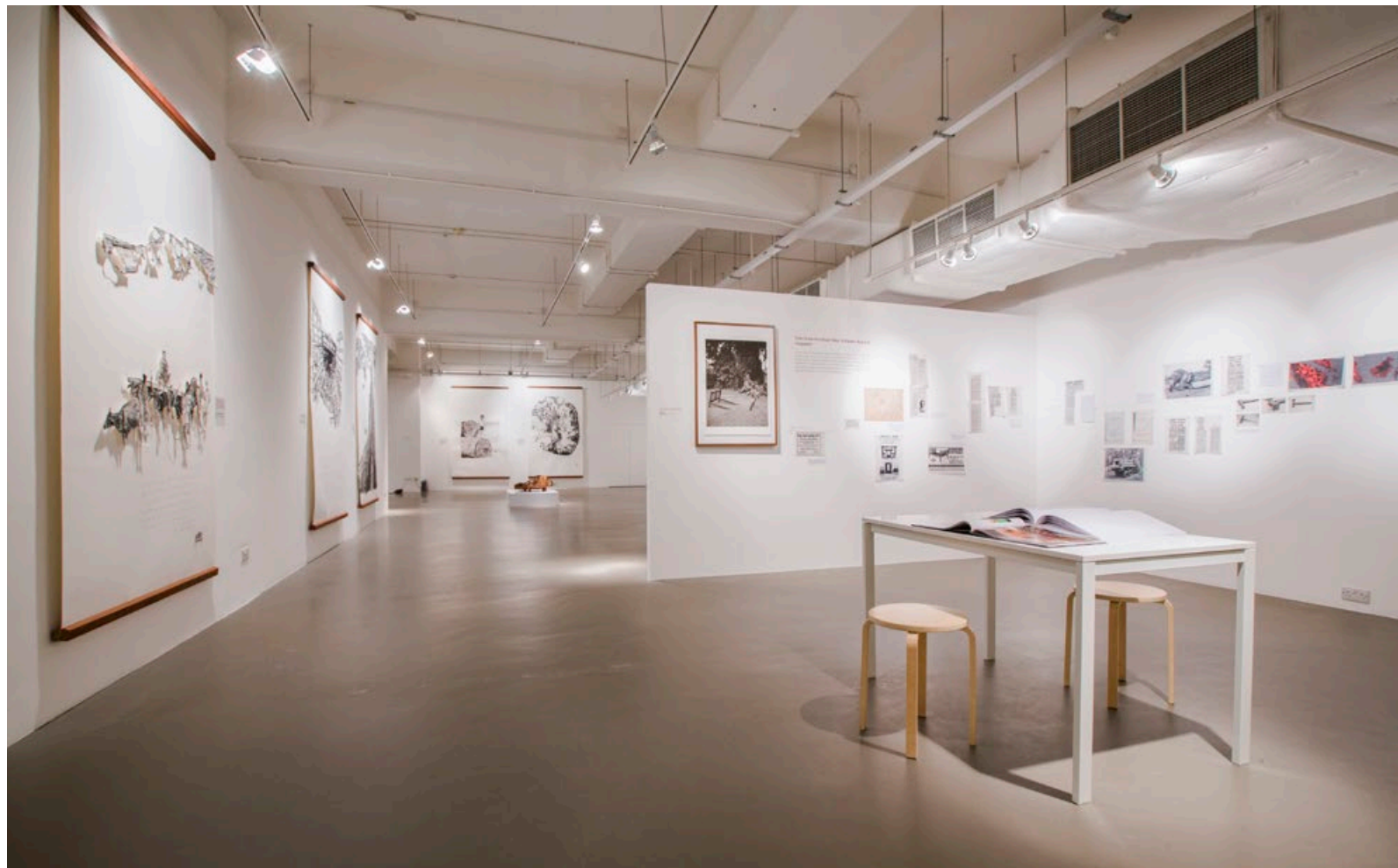
















TOUCH WOOD: SOME REFLECTIONS ON RESEARCHING THE TIMBER INDUSTRY IN SINGAPORE

BY SANDY YEO

Singapore was among the first countries in Asia to enter the timber and sawmill trade despite not having a timber producing forest. The first sawmill was set up in Singapore as early as 1902. However, despite the significance of the timber industry to Singapore's economy, its long history remains unfamiliar to many people, particularly to young people like myself.

A changing landscape

During my internship, a moment that stood out for me was a series of interviews we had with the founders of Nature Wood Pte Ltd: Mr Allen and Simon Oei. I was deeply impressed by Mr Allen Oei's passion towards his field. Unfortunately, his passion towards wood is unlikely to be shared by many Singaporeans. The unfavourable working conditions — having to work in dusty areas, under the scorching sun, loud noises — have probably deterred many locals from working in this industry, especially in the wake of a society which has seen rising education levels and affluence over the years. Mr Allen Oei noted, "The times have changed. In the '60s, '70s, we were still getting a lot of Singaporeans [yet] by the 80s, no more Singaporeans were interested in jobs in the sawmill." This situation is also reflected in the other factories we visited, which were largely dependent on foreign workers from Bangladesh and Myanmar.

The difficulty in getting Singaporeans to work in the timber industry has further led to problems of succession in family businesses. When Mr Allen Oei's son, Simon, first graduated from the National University of Singapore with a degree in Computing, he chose to work in Hewlett Packard as a programmer and Microsoft as a network engineer. He said, "Ask any graduates to choose between going to Sungei Kadut and any of the office areas, which one [will they] choose? I dare to tell you, 99%, they will choose the office areas." Indeed, in the age of managerial capitalism, family businesses no longer remain an 'in' thing because family firms have often been regarded as static — lacking in dynamism and unable to expand.¹ As such, educated members of the family might not want to remain in the family business and instead choose to join larger multi-national corporations elsewhere. In addition, this problem is compounded by a lack of interest. Many of the younger generation might not share the passion or interest in the field of their elders. For example, Singapore's education system gradually transitioned from a curriculum focused on technical training to an academic-based syllabus in the '80s. Students who are now schooled in the Humanities, Sciences and Languages would seem more likely to enter non-manufacturing jobs in contrast to the days where technical schools prevailed.

¹ S Gordon Redding, "Weak organizations and strong linkages: Managerial ideology and Chinese family business networks" in Raj Brown (ed), *Chinese Business Enterprise*, Vol. II (London: Routledge, 1996), p.384-398.

"Sunset industry"

Today, the industry is coming under further threat as a result of redevelopment. Businesses located in JTC-owned factories in the Sungei Kadut, Yew Tee and Kranji areas may have to relocate as part of the changes Singapore will undergo according to a new draft Master Plan.² Despite the lease on Sungei Kadut coming to a foreseeable end within the next decade, many businesses in the timber industry are looking to, or have already relocated and expanded overseas. For instance, companies such as Wason Private Limited and PVS International claim to have developed an integrated supply chain by establishing purchasing offices, warehouses and offices in China, Malaysia, Myanmar, Brazil, Ecuador and Romania. As an important caveat, it is worth mentioning that the environmental impact of these companies have yet to be examined. Further study needs to be conducted to provide a more qualitative and quantitative examination of the impact of these companies on the timber industry and upon the forest nations in which they are active.

From a purely business perspective, the timber industry's outlook remains relatively unknown and at times uncertain. Regionalisation and globalisation remain key to the survival and expansion of timber companies. An important concern lies with the depleting supplies of hardwood timber, due to irresponsible and often illegal

² Felda Chay, "JTC factories in Kadut, Yew Tee, Kranji face relocation", *The Business Times*, November 20, 2013.

logging practices. On the global level, demand for hardwood timber is growing steadily especially in Asia. Yet hardwood timber plantations have not been established at anywhere near a scale large enough to meet this growing demand. With supply faltering and demand growing, there has been real potential for price appreciation of timber. Corporations such as New Forests Pte Ltd are seizing the business opportunities present and claim to have begun investing in hardwood plantations.³ State-owned forestry enterprises in Vietnam, Thailand and Indonesia, looking to privatise assets and raise capital, have created a slight glimmer of hope for the timber industry. Perhaps rather than being a sunset industry a new, more sustainable chapter awaits?

History and heritage of the timber industry

Another concern lies with the difficulties of conducting research on primary Chinese sources in Singapore. I started off this project by delving into Chinese sources available on the timber industry in Singapore from the early 20th century to present times. NewspaperSG, a site managed by the National Library Board of Singapore, contains digital archives of newspapers published between 1831 and 2009. However, the search portal for Chinese articles would only return results from 1979 – 1983 for Nanyang Siang Pau and Sin Chew Jit Poh, and from 1983 – 2008 for Lianhe

³In a dialogue with Lucy Davis on such claims she cautions that “in the current environmental climate many players in world timber (alongside other exploiters of natural resources) are reinventing themselves as sustainable practitioners. However, a degree of skepticism is necessary in relation to such claims; particularly as global supply chains, sub-contractors and trade routes become all the more labyrinthine and the origins of timber become all the more difficult to ascertain.

Zaobao. For any period outside that, one would only have the option of using the “preview service” where a digitally scanned copy of the original material is shown, or otherwise entertain the prospect of reading microfilms. With the limited time I had for this part-time internship, it was simply too herculean a task to go through every single page of the various dailies spanning a few decades. I propose that a method to get through this problem would be to consult librarians for any newspaper clippings that they might have collated under the topic. Unfortunately, for the timber industry, there have been no attempts to collate the news articles related to this topic. Alternatively, one can limit the scope of the research project to a shorter time period. It would be of tremendous help to the research community if greater effort is taken to hasten the process of the digitization of Chinese sources.

Perhaps then, as the timber industry in Singapore is (although a far cry from it’s glory days), still in existence, we find little urgency in recording and documenting its history. However, as what little remainder of the industry survives, the people working directly with wood have changed many folds. The memories of these people, particularly the Singaporeans who worked in sawmills in the 1950s – 70s (or even earlier), is a much-neglected aspect of history.⁴ As a response, I suggest that oral history can be used to record the experience of timber workers. Oral history refers to the “interviewing of eye-witness participants in the events

⁴Lucy Davis has suggested that one possible reason for this occurrence might be a case of self-censorship, or reluctance to deal with an industry that has had such a negative regional and environmental reputation. Admittedly, this might be a possible reason and further study into these aspects is needed.

of the past for the purposes of historical reconstruction”.⁵ Oral history allows researchers to understand and weave in the diverse voices and emotions (which may change in time and space) of the timber workers. These complexities are hardly represented in official records or newspaper articles. The project entitled, “Economic Development of Singapore” initiated by the Oral History Department of the National Archives of Singapore captures some voices of the industry. Yet, their collection is far from exhaustive; and it remains a pity that with the limited time and other challenges we faced for this project, we did not get to interview any of the timber workers today.

David Lowenthal wrote that we have “allowed [heritage] to survive, to decay, or to disappear as the laws of nature and the whims of their fellow men dictated.”⁶ In recent years, following rapid changes to the environment and a subsequent sense of loss, much of the efforts around heritage (e.g. the Singapore Memory Project) have been centered on the everyday experience of a Singaporean, such as memories of our school days. This has an implication of neglecting Sungei Kadut in Singapore’s history whose everyday usage (until now) involves only a certain group of people. The memories and contribution of these transient workers are rarely taken into account when we envisage the Singapore Story. As Lucy Davies puts it, “industrial estates do not have the charm of Tiong Bahru or Joo Chiat; they bespeak of harsher realities where the

⁵Perks, Robert and Alistair Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*, 2nd Edition. (New York: Routledge Press, 2006), p.ix.

⁶David Lowenthal, *The Past is a foreign country* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.385.

human body is continuously subjected to the harsh materials and temporal rhythms of the industries. These are harder to render nostalgic by way of a soft-focus Instagram filter. Rather, this kind of memory-excavation requires a realism, and knowledge of its political and social economies”⁷.

I do hope that the timber industry’s buildings and artifacts would one day be seen as remnants of the past that is essential to our collective memory and identity. As Sungei Kadut is due for redevelopment, an assessment of the heritage value of the site should be done. It is possible for suitable sites to be restored for cultural heritage and tourism, as evidenced by Thow Kwang Dragon Kiln. It will certainly be a pity if this important chapter becomes relegated to a mere footnote in the history of Singapore.

⁷Email discussion with Lucy Davis June 2014.

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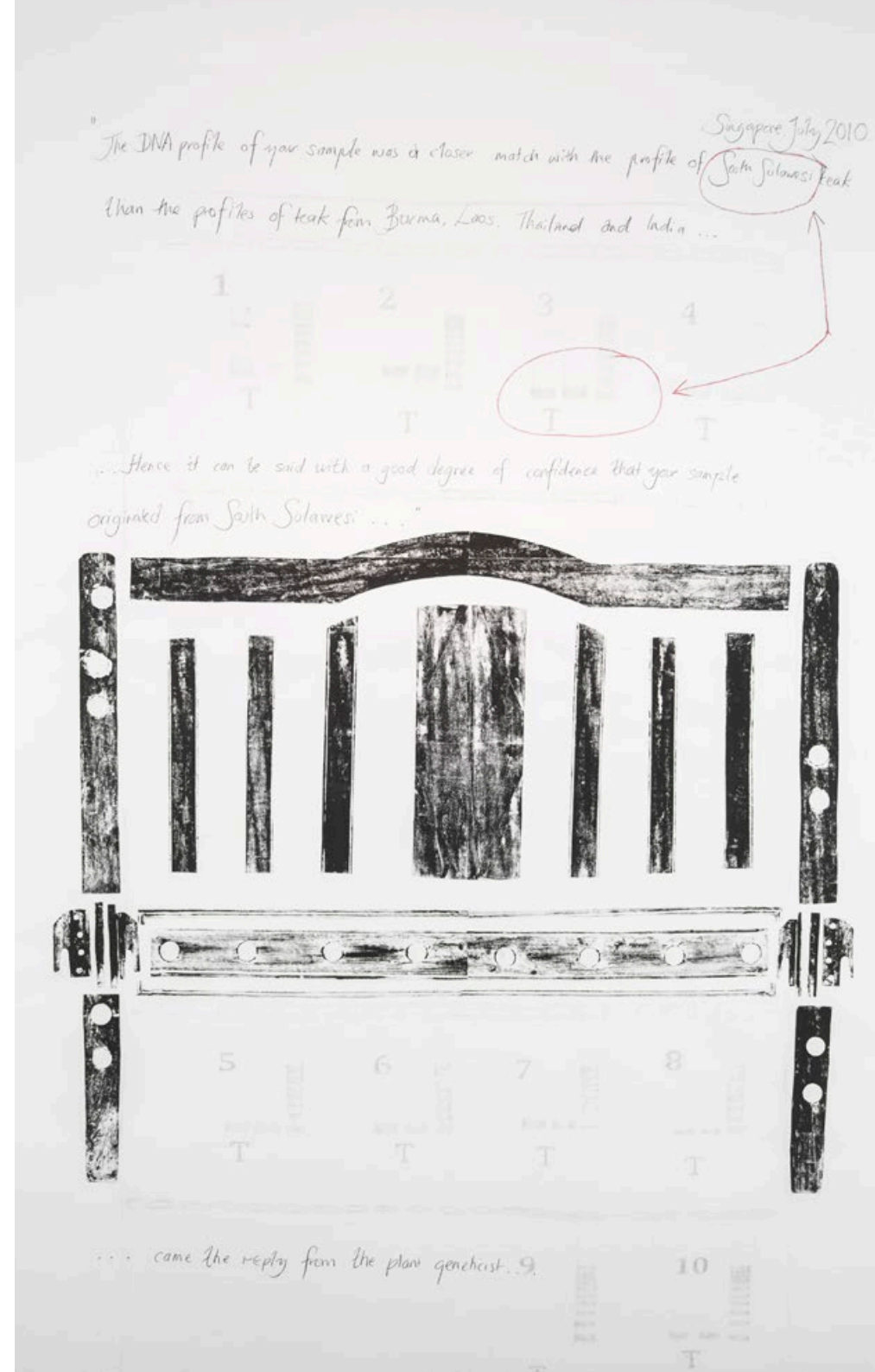
ARTWORKS

LUCY DAVIS



Ranjang Jati: The teak bed that got four humans from Singapore to travel to Muna Island, Southeast Sulawesi and back again.

—
2009
Lucy Davis
12 Wilton Close.
Photographed by Shannon Lee Castleman.
100 cm x 70 cm.



'The DNA profile from your sample was a closer match with the profile of South Sulawesi teak than the profiles of teak from Burma, Laos, Thailand and India. Hence it can be said with a good deal of confidence that your sample originated from South Sulawesi ...' came the reply from the plant geneticist.

—
2012
Lucy Davis
Ranjang Jati (Teak Bed).
Woodprint of a 1930's teak bed found in a Singapore junk store.
Collage on Paper.
240 cm x 150 cm.

Photograph by Norman Ng.



"Your bed is a style from the 1930s or 1940s. It was made perhaps by the kind of furniture makers that there used to be along Victoria Street. It's a style that would have been bought by Chinese or Peranakan families. I would guess that the timber came from Burma. That's where most of the timber came from in those days ..." said 'David with the Big Eyes', the second-hand furniture seller from Rangoon Rd, Singapore 2010.



"Your bed is a style from around the 1940s. It was made perhaps by the kind of furniture makers that there used to be along Victoria Street. It's a style that would have been bought by Chinese or Peranakan families. I would guess that the timber came from Burma. That's where most of the timber came from in those days ..." said 'David with the Big Eyes', the second-hand furniture seller from Rangoon Rd, Singapore 2010.

—
2012

Lucy Davis

Woodprint collage reproduction of David's thumbprint in prints of a 1930's teak bed found in Singapore.

Collage on paper.

240 cm x 150 cm.

Full size photograph by Kee Ya Ting.

Detail photograph by Norman Ng.



Tectona Grandis



Tectona Grandis after William Roxburgh 'Plants of the Coast of Coromandel' Vol. 1 London: W. Bulmer and Co. 1795, plate 6. Reproduced in woodprints from a teak bed found in Singapore in 2009, dated 1940-1950. Completed 2013 in collaboration with Kee Ya Ting.



Tectona Grandis after William Roxburgh, *Plants of the Coast of Coromandel*, vol. 1 (London: W. Bulmer and Co, 1795), plate 6.

—
2013

Lucy Davis

Woodprints from a 1930's teak bed found in Singapore.

Charcoal on paper.

240 cm x 150 cm.

Full size photograph by Kee Ya Ting.

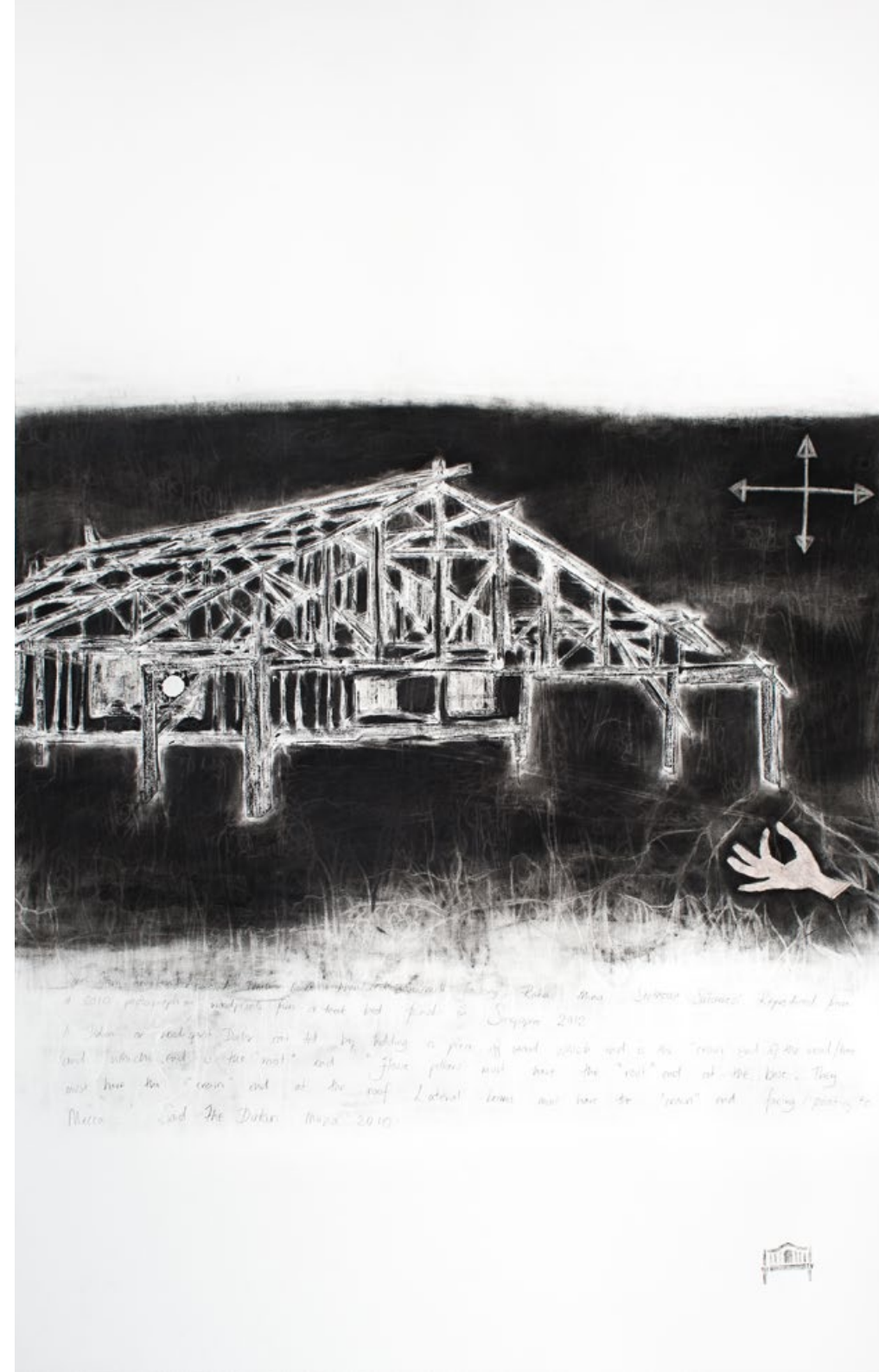
Detail photograph by Norman Ng.



Pokok Ranjang Jati (Teak Bed Tree)

—
 2012
 Lucy Davis
 Woodprint collage of a 1930's teak bed found
 in Singapore.
 Collage on Paper.
 240 cm x 150 cm.

Photograph by Kee Ya Ting.

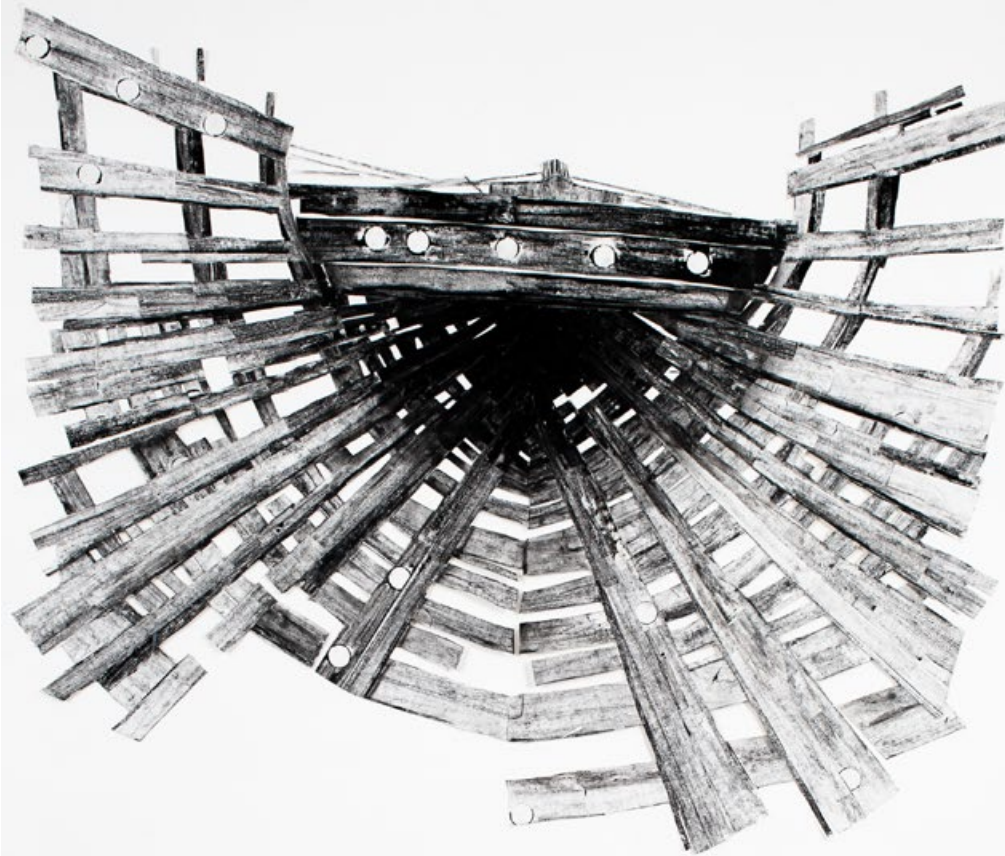


A *dukun* or wood spirit doctor can tell by holding a piece of wood, which end is the 'crown' end of the wood/tree and which end is the root.

'House pillars must have the root end at the base. They must have the crown at the roof. Lateral beams must have the crown end pointing to Mecca ...' said the *dukun*, Muna, 2010.

—
 2012
 Lucy Davis
 Reproduction of a photograph of an abandoned
 sawmill factory in Raha, Muna Island, Southeast
 Sulawesi, 2010.
 Woodprints from a 1930's teak bed found
 in Singapore.
 Collage on Paper.
 240 cm x 150 cm.

Photograph by Kee Ya Ting.



Supri's September 2010

"The fifties and sixties were a violent time for Sulawesi. Maybe your teak was smuggled to Singapore as contraband by Bugis traders in return for weapons ..." wrote the advisor from Kendari.

... wrote the advisor from Kendari.

[An attempt to reconstruct a Bugis boat photographed in Muna Island, Southeast Sulawesi, in 2010 from a 1930's teak bed found in Singapore in 2009]

"The fifties and sixties were a violent time for Sulawesi. Maybe your teak was smuggled to Singapore as contraband by Bugis traders in return for weapons ..." wrote the advisor from Kendari.

—
2012
Lucy Davis
An attempt to reconstruct a teak Bugis boat, photographed in Muna Island, Southeast Sulawesi, 2010.
Woodprints from a 1930's teak bed found in Singapore.
Collage on Paper.
240 cm x 150 cm.

Photograph by Kee Ya Ting.



The only *konservasi* or conservation-status forests which have not been cut into by Muna villagers are particularly old plantations which are considered to be haunted. In these haunted plantations (*hutan hantu*), a strange 'battle' has developed between those impressive teak trees that remain, and banyan or strangling figs which have grown from seeds dispersed by birds or other forest creatures in the canopy. Possibly because of the imposing form that it takes and the way that the banyan 'possesses' other trees, it is regarded in cultures throughout the Malay Archipelago as having strong positive and negative powers.

—
2012
Lucy Davis
Banyan and Teak, Muna, Southeast Sulawesi, 2010
Woodprints from a 1930's teak bed found in Singapore.
Collage on paper.
240 cm x 150 cm.

Photograph by Kee Ya Ting.



'The Lesser Sulphur Crested Cockatoo is critically endangered in its native Sulawesi ... However, introduced populations are curiously able to thrive elsewhere ...' said the amateur ornithologist, Singapore, November 2010.

2012

Lucy Davis

While we were photographing teak and banyan trees in the overgrown, and purportedly haunted, *konservasi* plantation one morning, a flock of cockatoos made a noisy appearance in the canopy. Perhaps they came to eat the banyan seeds.

Charcoal on paper.

240 x 150 cm.

Photograph by Kee Ya Ting.



'Teak is believed to have been introduced to Muna hundreds of years ago as a gift from an envoy of the Javanese court to our king. The envoy settled in Muna and was given a royal title. That is why teak is called "*kulijawa*" in Muna language. Back then only the king could plant teak trees. Later the Dutch took over and intensified teak production. Then during the Japanese Occupation they controlled the plantations. After independence it was the turn of the Indonesian government. Only in the last ten years has it been legal for Muna villagers to cultivate teak for commercial purposes ...' said the oral historian from Raha.

2012

Lucy Davis

Reproduction of a historic photograph of the Muna Island, Southeast Sulawesi, teak industry from the collection of Mr W. T. Bermuli.

Woodprints from a 1930's teak bed found in Singapore.

Charcoal on paper.

240 cm x 150 cm.

Photograph by Kee Ya Ting.



'I don't remember this photograph being taken!
The only time I remember going to my Dad's factories
was when I was a teenager. He asked me to paint
the ends of the wood to protect them from getting
cracked. I used blue paint as we use colours to
indicate which wood belongs to which buyer. [But]...
after less than 2 hours I told him it was impossible.
I said "I'm tired, I really cannot do it!"... It was so hot!
The sun was terrible!'

—
2014

Lucy Davis

Reproduction of a photo of timber merchant Simon
Oei as a child in the 1970's standing in the grounds
of P. Bork A/S International, Kranji, where his father
Allen Oei was employed.

Reproduced in prints of one of the last logs from
Burma to be imported to Singapore after a 31 March
2013 log export ban.

Collage on Paper.

220 cm x 150 cm.

Photograph by Norman Ng.



—
2014

Lucy Davis
Together Again (Wood:Cut) Part V: EVIDENCE
Part of what is supposedly the last shipment of teak
logs to Singapore from Burma before a 31 March
2014 ban on whole log exports by the Burmese
government. The log ends were donated by Allen Oei,
an old-time Singapore timber trader and log grader.

—
2014

Lucy Davis

Assembled print fragments of a ripped-up log end.

Photographs on this page by Norman Ng.



Together Again (Wood:Cut) Part V: EVIDENCE
 Part of what is supposedly the last shipment of teak logs to Singapore from Burma before a 31 March 2014 ban on whole log exports by the Burmese government. The log ends were donated by Allen Oei, an old-time Singaporean timber trader and log grader. The letter and number marks were punched into to the wood in Burma. They tell you the grade of the timber and (if you can decode the marks) where in Burma the logs come from. A star apparently means best quality.

—
 2014
 Lucy Davis
 Assembled print fragments of a ripped-up log end.

Photographs on this page by Norman Ng.

SHANNON LEE CASTLEMAN



Older teak plantations have been officially given *konservasi* (conservation) status—not in order to preserve biodiversity, but in order to conserve the water table after decades of forest destruction and over-harvesting of teak.

—
Shannon Lee Castleman
Logging in a *konservasi* forest.
Scenes from an Island After A Timber Boom,
2010, Muna Island, Southeast Sulawesi.
Archival digital print 176 cm x140 cm.

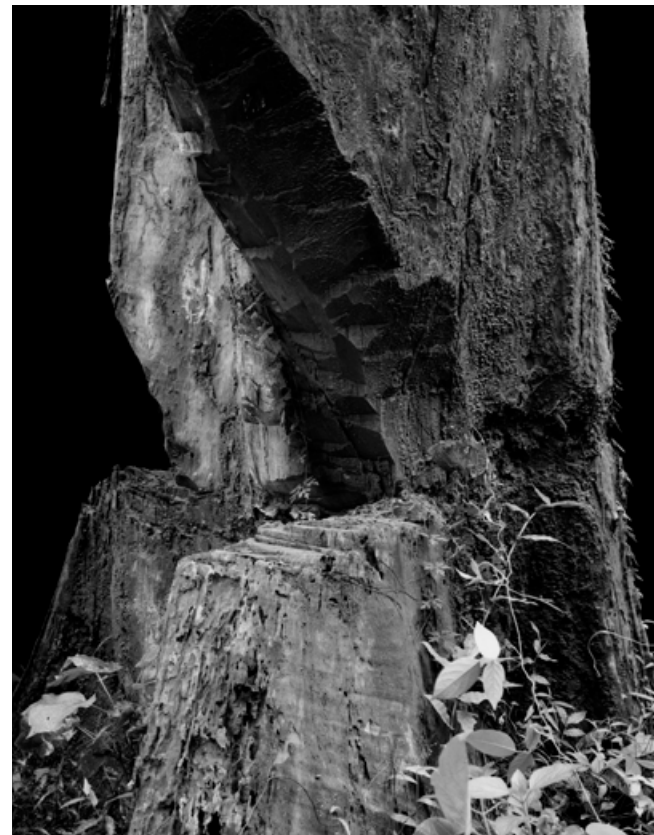


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Logging in a *konservasi* forest.
Scenes from an Island After A Timber Boom,
2010, Muna Island, Southeast Sulawesi.
Archival digital print 176 cm x140 cm.





Before 2000, villagers were only permitted to cut down the teak from the forest if the wood was used to build their homes. We learned how people often cut down more teak than they needed and sold off the extra timber. This led me to speculate that perhaps the wood from our bed could have originated from the same forest as one of the houses that was built in the late 1930 -1940's.

—
Shannon Lee Castleman
Teak houses.
Scenes from an Island After A Timber Boom.
2010, Muna Island, Southeast Sulawesi.
Archival digital print, 128 cm x 100 cm.



—
Shannon Lee Castleman
Teak houses.
Scenes from an Island After A Timber Boom.
2010, Muna Island, Southeast Sulawesi.
Archival digital print, 128 cm x 100 cm.

I AM LIKE THE KARUNG GUNI OF TEAK!
TALES FROM AN ISLAND AFTER A TIMBER BOOM

A PHOTO BOOK

—
2014
Published by NUS Museum for the Migrant Ecologies Project.

Conceptualized by Lucy Davis in collaboration with Kee Ya Ting.
Edited by Kenneth Tay and Jason Wee.
Designed by Dennice Juwono.
Printed by First Printers, Singapore.

**I AM LIKE
THE KARUNG GUNI OF TEAK!**

**TALES FROM AN ISLAND
AFTER A TIMBER BOOM**



Tanjung Sengatta East Kalimantan Log Camp 1972–78.



Allen Oei in action grading logs. Tanjung Sengatta, East Kalimantan, Indonesia 1972–78.



Allen Oei, measuring one of a shipment to Singapore of the last export logs from Burma before a 31 March ban.
Photograph by Kee Ya Ting, April 2014.



Simon Oei photographed by his Dad in the grounds
of P Bork A/S International 1974.



Allen & Simon Oei's Nature Wood Warehouse at 31 Sungei Kadut Street 4.
Photograph by Kee Ya Ting, April 2014.

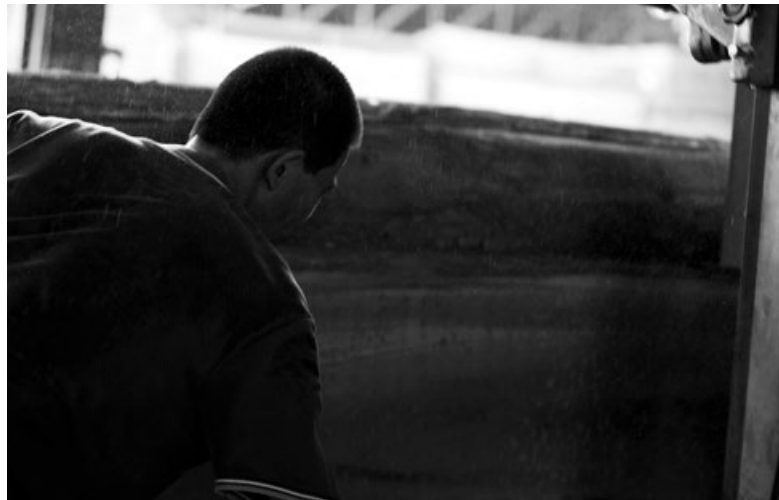


Old circular saw machinery at Allen & Simon Oei's Nature Wood Warehouse at 31 Sungei Kadut Street 4.
Photographs on this page by Kee Ya Ting, April 2014.

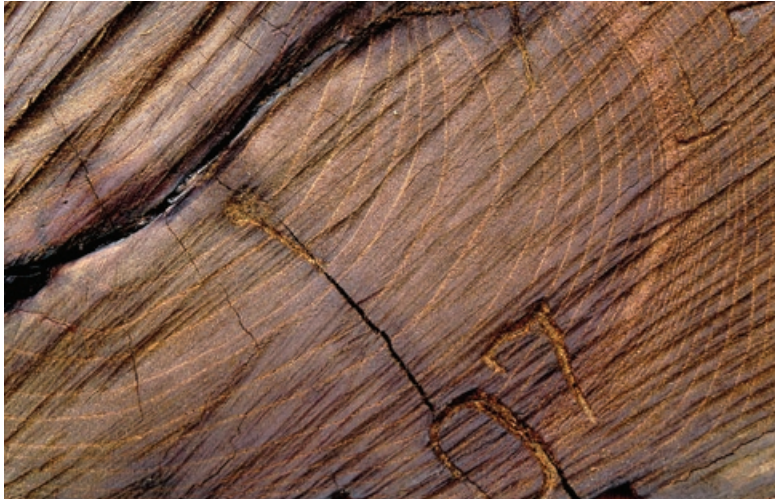




Chen Gang Jie and Wong Shao Guo at Allen & Simon Oei's Nature Wood Warehouse at 31 Sungei Kadut Street 4.
Photographs on this page by Kee Ya Ting, April 2014.



Some of the last logs imported to Singapore from Burma before the 31 March 2014 export ban.
 Allen & Simon Oei's Nature Wood Warehouse at 31 Sungei Kadut Street 4.
Photograph by Lucy Davis, April 2014.



All photographs on this spread:
 Close up of an end of one of the last logs imported to Singapore from Burma before the
 31 March 2014 export ban. Donated to our project by Allen & Simon Oei.
Photographs on this spread by Lucy Davis, April 2014.



JALAN JATI (TEAK ROAD)

23 MINUTES, 2012
ANIMATION STILLS

*Concept, Direction & Animation: Lucy Davis.
Music & Sound Design: Zai Kuning & Zai Tang.
Editors: Tan Jac Benjamin, Edwina Ong Zhi Yi & Yap Su Zhen Michelle.*

RIGHT SPREAD
A Bed Remembers an Island, an Island Remembers a Bird.
Charcoal and woodprint collage from a teak bed on paper, 2012.





All animation stills on this spread:
A Bed Remembers an Island, an Island Remembers a Bird.
 Charcoal and woodprint collage from a teak bed on paper, 2012.

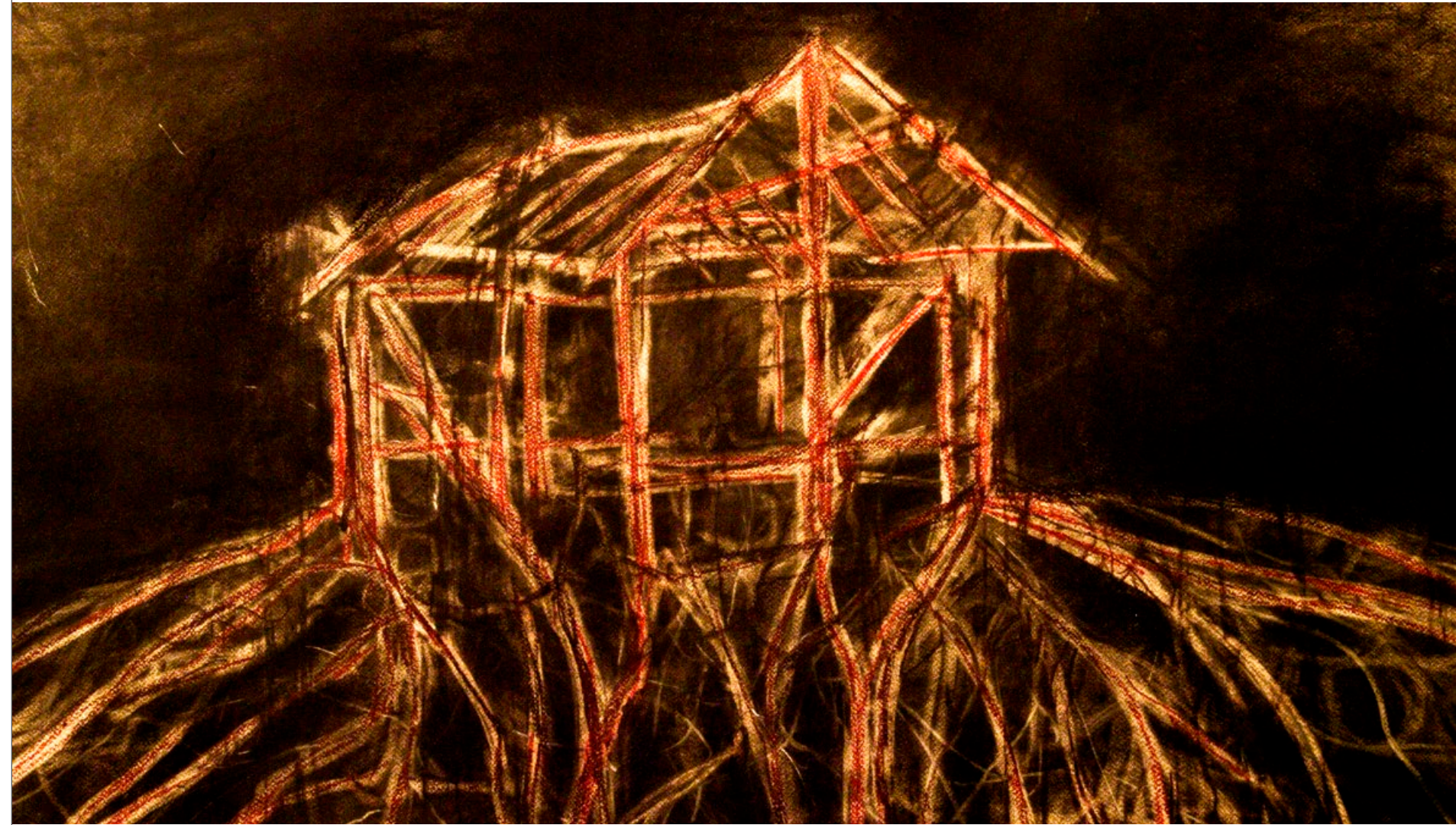




All animation stills on this spread:
Scenes From a Town After a Timber Boom II: Singapore.
 Charcoal and woodprint collage from a teak bed on paper, 2012.



All animation stills on this spread:
Banyan Battles with Teak, Magic Battles with Science.
 Charcoal and woodprint collage from a teak bed on paper, 2012.



BUILDING NANYANG UNIVERSITY

ONE ROOM ANIMATED INSTALLATION

BY LUCY DAVIS

Together Again (Wood:Cut) Part IV: ART HISTORIES

—
2014
Lucy Davis
Building Nanyang University

Installation comprised of:

Balau scaffolding inspired by the scaffolding on the woodblock print “Nanyang University” by Lee Kee Boon, 1955 (1999).

Animated wooden storage boxes with shadow puppets made of print fragments of a 1930’s teak bed and 2014 Burmese logs. Wooden storage boxes purchased from small family business Kian Chun Gifts & Souvenirs, #06-03 Telok Blangah Industrial Estate, 1200 Depot rd.

Six boxes of assorted timber samples with the Malay names of trees punched into each block, formerly belonging to the Botany department of the University of Malaya, which became the National University of Singapore. Kindly donated to the Migrant Ecologies Project by the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum.

*Technical support by Leonardus Adi Prasetya Suherlan.
Photograph by Norman Ng.*

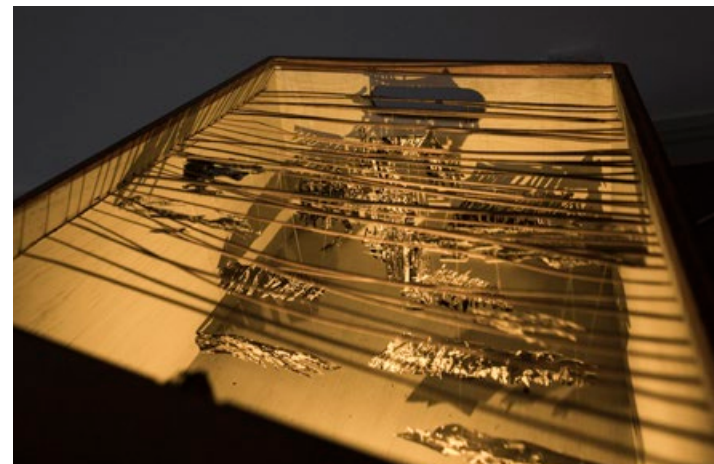
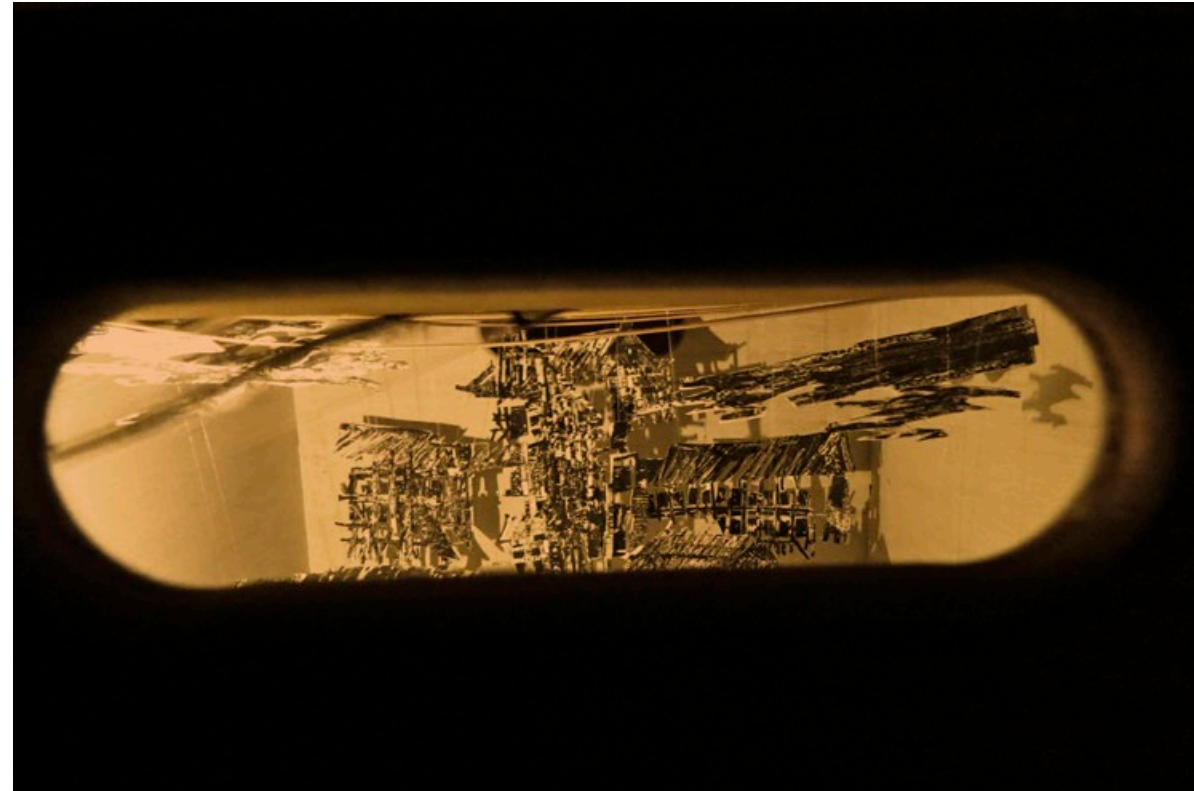




Together Again (Wood:Cut) PART IV: ART HISTORIES

—
2013
Lucy Davis
Advert for Diamond Bedsteads from The Straits Times, 12 January 1937, recast in print fragments from a 1930's Diamond teak bedstead found in Rangoon road in 2009.

*Dedicated to Cheong Kah Kit and Fiona Tan.
Photographs on this page by Norman Ng.*



Together Again (Wood:Cut) PART IV: ART HISTORIES

—
2013
Lucy Davis
Lee Kee Boon, *Nanyang University*, 1955 (1999), recast in print fragments from a 1930's teak bed found in Rangoon road in 2009.

*Dedicated to Cherian George.
Large photograph on top by Lucy Davis.
Photograph on the left by Norman Ng.*



Together Again (Wood:Cut) PART IV: ART HISTORIES

—
2014
Lucy Davis
Lim Mu Hue, Love, 1962, recast in prints of one of the last logs from Burma to be imported to Singapore after a 31 March 2014 log export ban.

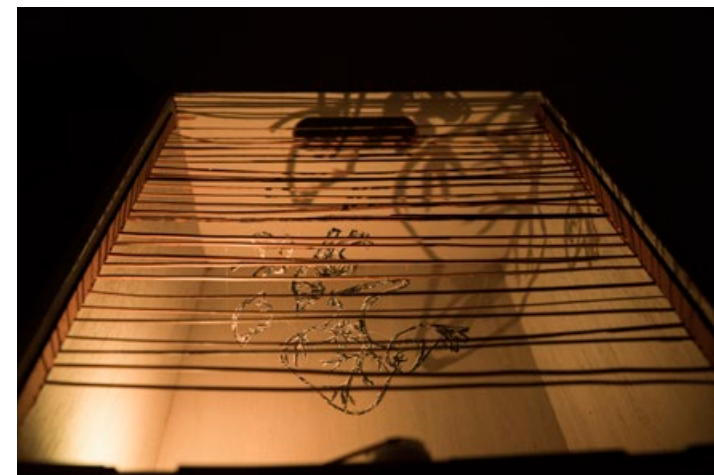
*Dedicated to Lee Wen.
Photograph by Lucy Davis.*



Together Again (Wood:Cut) PART IV: ART HISTORIES

—
2014
Lucy Davis
Anatomical drawing of a human heart, put together again in prints of one of the last logs from Burma to be imported to Singapore after a 31 March 2014 log export ban.

*Dedicated to Lee Weng Choy.
Photographs on this page by Norman Ng.*





Together Again (Wood:Cut) PART IV: ART HISTORIES

—
 2013
 Lucy Davis
 The last tiger killed in Singapore 1930's Chua Chu Kang Village put together again via prints from a 1930's teak bed found off Rangoon road in 2009.

*Dedicated to Kevin Chua & Ho Tzu Nyen.
 Photograph by Lucy Davis.*



Malayan Timber Samples

These six boxes of assorted timber samples with the Malay names of trees punched into each block, formerly belonged to the Botany department of the University of Malaya, which became the National University of Singapore. They were kindly donated to the Migrant Ecologies Project by the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum.

Photograph by Norman Ng.



Malayan Timber Samples

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All photographs on this spread by Norman Ng.



Acknowledgements

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National University of Singapore Museum: Kenneth Tay, assistant curator; Trina Bong, outreach assistant manager – outreach; Donald-Eric Lim, exhibitions officer; Michelle Kuek, outreach manager; and Ahmad Mashadi, head of museum

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School of Art Design and Media, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore: Peer M. Sathikh, associate chair (academic); Michael Walsh, associate chair (research); and Vibeke Sorensen, chair

Nature Wood Pte Ltd: Allen Oei, Simon Oei, Nevin Chua and Chen Gang Jie

National Gallery Singapore: Mustafa Shabbir Hussain, curator

Singapore Art Museum: Faisal Husni, assistant curator; Tan Siu Li, senior curator; and Susie Lingham, director

Muna Island, Southeast Sulawesi: La Kusa, director for PR, Kantor Bupati Muna; La Ode Sirad Imbo, local historian and independent academic; W. T. Bermuli, former sawmill engineer; and Safudin, Pentiro village head; as well as our driver Erwin Kendari, Southeast Sulawesi; and Muhamadiyah Yusof, our guide in Muna

Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh: Elinor Gallant, exhibitions officer; Max Coleman, science communicator; and Ian Edwards, head of exhibitions and events

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FOST Gallery Singapore: Stephanie Fong, director

Post-Museum, Singapore: Jennifer Teo & Woon Tien Wei, artistic directors

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BIOGRAPHIES

THE MIGRANT ECOLOGIES PROJECT

Lucy Davis is an artist, writer and Assistant Professor, School of Art Design and Media, Nanyang Technological University Singapore. She is founder of the Migrant Ecologies Project. Migrant Ecologies’ research was Finalist, French Prix COAL Art & Ecology Award (2011) and nominated for the APBC Signature Asia Pacific Art Prize Singapore Art Museum (2011). Her short film *Jalan Jati* toured widely and won Promotion Award at Oberhausen ISFF (2012) and two Singapore Short Film Awards (2013). Lucy is SEAsia Contributor for *ANTENNAE*, *The Journal of Nature in Visual Culture* (UK) and has written for: *Considering Animals*; *The DOCUMENTA #12 READER*; *BROADHSEET Art & Culture*; *Art Asia Pacific*; *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*; *NU The Nordic Art Review*. Lucy was Founding Editor of *FOCAS Forum on Contemporary Art & Society 2000-2007*.

Shannon Lee Castleman received her MFA in Photography, San Francisco Art Institute and her BFA in Photography, New York University. She works in photography and video and is currently Visiting Assistant Professor at Virginia Commonwealth University. In 2013 she was Visiting Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies at San Francisco Art Institute. From 2006 – 2013 Shannon was Assistant Professor of Photography and Digital Imaging at the School of Art, Design and Media at Nanyang Technological University (NTU) Singapore. Before joining NTU she taught photography at Dar Al Hekma College in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Shannon received a Murphy & Cadogan Fine Arts Fellowship in 2003 and the Gary B. Fritz Imagemaker Award for Excellence from the Society of Photographic Education in 2012. She has exhibited an published in the United States, Europe and throughout Asia.

Kee Ya Ting is a young Singaporean photographer. Her previous endeavours in film have cultivated a desire to tell stories within still frames, or in her own words, "visual poetry". Taking a whimsical approach to often-serious fields of studies, she aspires to create a space where these two worlds meet. Her works display elements of humour, play and discovery, painting poetry with light. She has exhibited in galleries in Singapore, London, and China, and was selected for the 3rd Singapore International Photography Festival (SIPF) and the 5th Dali International Photography Exhibition.

BIOGRAPHIES

CONTRIBUTORS

Ahmad Mashadi is Head of NUS Museum, National University of Singapore. Recent exhibitions curated include *Camping and Tramping Through the Colonial Archive* (2011) tracing the museological imaginary of colonial Malaya, and *Heman Chong: Calendars 2020-2096* (2011) featuring Chong's latest body of photographs based on Singapore. He also initiated *Curating Lab* (2012), a curatorial intensive and internship programme for Singapore students and recent graduates.

Kenneth Tay is Assistant Curator at the National University of Singapore (NUS) Museum. His research background is in literary theory and visual culture, with an emphasis on the histories and theories of photography and the moving image. Of late he is also interested in the notion of the curatorial as one that encourages overreading to happen. Some of his previous curatorial involvements include *In Search of Raffles' Light | An Art Project with Charles Lim* (2013) and *ETCETERA: footnotes on Ng Eng Teng, or how to follow an artist who is always two steps ahead* (2014).

Jason Wee is an artist and a writer. His art practice is concerned with the hollowing out of singular authority in favour of conundrums and polyphony. He transforms these singular histories and spaces into various visual and written materials. He runs Grey Projects, an artists’ space and residency in Tiong Bahru. He was a 2005 – 2006 Studio Fellow at the Whitney Museum ISP. He is a graduate of Harvard GSD. He is the author of *My Suit* (2011) and *Tongues* (2012). His latest poetry book *The Monsters Between Us* was named by TODAY newspaper as one of the top art picks of 2013.

Sandy Yeo is a history undergraduate at the National University of Singapore. Her research interests span across various fields to include Singapore's heritage, the dynamics of romantic relationships of the past and how it is affected by the socio-political landscape, and human trafficking. As part of her interest in Singapore's heritage, she has embarked on a mission to try out all the best hawker food on the island. Her fascination with Singapore's timber industry grew while researching for the project "*When you get closer to the heart, you may find cracks*", though she admits that she is still green in this field. In her free time, she volunteers at the Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore (MINDS).

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