

# Director's Note

In 1953, four artists – Chen Wen Hsi, Chen Chong Swee, Cheong Soo Pieng and Liu Kang – held an exhibition in Singapore where they showed paintings and sketches inspired by their 1952 trip to Bali and Java, an exhibition that has since been hailed as a landmark in Singapore's art history.

However, while the exhibition has been much discussed in the ensuing decades, much less is known about the actual trip itself. All this has changed with a new exhibition by the National Library Board – *Untold Stories: Four Singapore Artists' Quest for Inspiration in Bali 1952* – which is accompanied by a new book, *Bali 1952: Through the Lens of Liu Kang*.

Based on previously unseen photos of the trip to Bali and Java, as well as plenty of original research by Gretchen Liu, the daughter-in-law of Liu Kang, the book and exhibition will be welcomed by anyone interested in an important moment in Singapore art.

In this issue of *BiblioAsia*, we are focusing on the 1952 trip. It starts with Gretchen Liu's account of how she found Liu Kang's old shoebox containing around one thousand forgotten negatives capturing the seven weeks that the four artists spent in Indonesia. But why were they attracted to Bali? Librarian-curators Nadia Ramli and Goh Yu Mei examine the allure of Bali and the construction of the island's mystique, an effort that goes back more than a century.

To understand why these four artists were groundbreaking, a good place to start is Low Sze Wee's article on how artists such as Liu Kang straddled East and West. Besides serving as the Group Director (Museums) at the National Heritage Board, Low was also involved as a consultant for the *Untold Stories* exhibition.

As fascinating as the Bali trip and exhibition are, this issue covers lots of other ground. Fans of Dick Lee's "Home" should not miss the piece on Singapore's search for National Day songs penned by Prof Bernard Tan, who weaved in his personal experience as chairman of the Sing Singapore organising committee. Meanwhile, librarians Rosxalynd Liu and Nathaniel Chew examine the history of deaf education in Singapore, while Alvin Tan looks at Mazu worship at the Thian Hock Keng temple. Finally, if you think you know all about Badang the Strongman, William L. Gibson will make you think again.

As usual, you can't throw a rock without hitting an interesting article to read in *BiblioAsia*. I hope you enjoy this issue and do make time to visit our latest exhibition at Level 10 of the National Library Building by 3 August 2025.

**Alicia Yeo**  
Director  
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### On the cover

The four artists at Kallang Airport for their flight to Jakarta, 8 June 1952. (From left): Liu Kang, Chen Chong Swee, Cheong Soo Pieng and Chen Wen Hsi. © *Liu Kang Family*.

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