

Going Places

The Place Poetry of Singapore

THE
ARTS
HOUSE
home to words

10
YEARS



Chinatown in 1998.
Image courtesy of
Terence Heng.

while it may not have “organically” morphed into a legitimate national icon, it still has had a lasting influence on the sense of history and national identity of Singaporeans. The exhibition features a number of Merlion poems that reflect the connection (or lack thereof) that Singaporeans may feel toward this somewhat kitschy icon.

*But this lion of the sea
Salt-maned, scaly, wondrous of tail,
Touched with power, insistent
On this brief promontory...
Puzzles.*

– “Ulysses By The Merlion”, Edwin Thumboo

*I am the scion of a wealthy race.
I wear the silver armour of my moneyed
people.*

– “The Merlion To Ulysses”, Lee Tzu Pheng

All the poems featured in the exhibition are accompanied by the voice recordings of the poets reading their work(s) and recounting the occasional inside-story behind the poem. While the memories may be specific to the poets themselves, the ideas and histories of the places that they mention undeniably form a part of who we are as Singaporeans whether we choose to accept it or not. Places such as Chinatown, with its contrasts between new and old, “authentic” and “artificial”, form a part of our multifarious “*rojak culture*” as described by Terence Heng.

Old images and videos of Singapore provided by the National Archives Singapore (NAS) are showcased alongside the poems, providing audiences with a more immersive and meaningful experience of the exhibition.

While the visual aspect of the exhibition may invoke feelings of displacement and a melancholic loss of history and the familiar physical identifiers of space, “Going Places” hopes to inspire Singaporeans to remember the city as they know it and to create new memories of the Singapore we experience today. ♦

“Going Places” is held at the Print & Film Gallery at The Arts House between 26 March and 18 May 2014.

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