

700 YEARS OF VISUAL ARTS: SINGAPORE IN THE WORLD

Adopting a *longer*, more *connected*, and *inclusive* approach to teaching and learning art histories through Singapore's engagement with Southeast Asia and the world from the 9th to 19th centuries.

A course offering by the
Art History Minor Programme at the
Department of History, Faculty of Arts and
Social Sciences, National University of Singapore

This course is offered through the following channels:

- As an undergraduate blended learning course for NUS students.
- As part of Continuing Education and Training (CET) for a Singaporean and global learner base.

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BACKGROUND: TECHNOLOGY-ENHANCED TEACHING AND LEARNING AT NUS

700 Years of Visual Arts: Singapore in the World is developed by the Art History Minor Programme, Department of History at the National University of Singapore (NUS). This course arises as part of the University's sustained commitment to technology-enhanced and accessible education for diverse audiences. Under the auspices of the University's Office of the Provost and LIF-T (Learning Innovation Fund – Technology) initiative, NUS has published online programmes across an array of subjects.

More recently, NUS has pivoted towards blended teaching and learning to offer lifelong, flexible, and personalized educational experiences. *700 Years*, accordingly, participates in NUS's concerted effort to engage its undergraduate, local, and global learner base via technology-integrated and innovative pedagogies.



COURSE SUMMARY: ADDRESSING THE NEED FOR LOCAL / REGIONAL ART HISTORIES

These and myriad other questions have recently become of critical prominence within local scholarship—especially since conversations about Singapore’s history and age have gained momentum following the bicentennial of the island nation’s “founding” by Stamford Raffles in 1819. This course then offers a timely enjoinder to such a connected history of Singapore from the 9th to 19th centuries.



700 Years draws on Singapore's museums and archives to examine our region's unique objects, ranging from mass-produced ceramics and textiles to bespoke paintings and manuscripts. The course employs art history's long-established methods alongside recent approaches responsive to locally specific and transcultural contexts. In this way, the course offers a long overdue curriculum in art history education informed by a uniquely Singaporean and Southeast Asian sensibility.

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AT A GLANCE

- ***This course presents a first-of-its-kind “Introduction to the History of Singaporean Art” for local and global learners.***

While universities have for long offered courses along the lines of “The Arts of China”, “Introduction to Indian Art”, “The Arts of Classical Greece”, we have not seen a Singaporean counterpart: this course fills a long-standing gap in art history education.

- ***This course is designed and presented in an online, digital format.***

This online course is accessible to learners beyond Singapore’s tertiary education context. It is designed for a diverse and worldwide community of learners including arts professionals, docents, curators, collectors, artists, and students interested in an introduction to the histories of artistic production in and around Singapore and the Southeast Asian region.



- ***This course integrates and presents Singapore's national collections through a distinctly art historical curriculum and pedagogy.***

Singapore's national museum and archival collections are typically spotlighted via curatorial and scholarly projects—namely, exhibitions, catalogues, and publications. Our national collections are also integrated in primary and secondary school learning journeys and in undergraduate courses related to Singapore Studies. *700 Years*, however, uniquely brings our various national collections into conversation within a single dedicated, and introductory art history curriculum.

- ***This course cultivates an inclusive and expansive approach to art history among learners.***

Our goal is to inculcate ideas of historical latitude, connectedness, and globality in the context of a Singaporean art history—even at the introductory level and for learners possessing various levels of familiarity with local/regional contexts. To that end, *700 Years* looks well past Stamford Raffles's arrival in 1819 to tell a yet longer history of Singapore's interaction with the region and the world through trade, politics, and religion. Narrating this long and connected history moreover requires earnest engagement with diverse objects, artworks, and genres which have conventionally been excluded from art history's scope of study. This course, accordingly, and in contrast, examines not only bespoke, specially commissioned paintings, buildings, and manuscripts; we make sure also to recognize ceramics, textiles, and myriad other "craft" forms chiefly produced for the mass-market as being artistically significant objects. Thus *700 Years* encourages learners to expand their understandings of local and regional artistic production in three crucial ways:

- temporally, by acknowledging Singapore's *longue durée*, or deep history,
- materially, by considering a wider range of



objects as part of our arts, and

- culturally, by including more peoples and traditions in our definition of “Singaporean.”

- ***This course combines conventional methods with the most recent and revisionist approaches in the field.***

The course draws on art history’s foundational methodologies, such as formalism, iconography, and iconology. All the same, we remain attentive to recent approaches toward post-colonial, transcultural, and global art histories, i.e., those art histories that expand older and narrow Euro-American paradigms to include underrepresented geographies, people, and materials.

- ***This course looks beyond familiar collections and textbook narratives.***

The course disrupts the predominance of Euro-American collections as well as conventional textbooks and their typical art historical narratives which saturate the field. Instead, this course encourages learners to engage local and regional collections and archives in order to endow the discipline with a revisionist and inclusive tone.

- ***This course adopts a learner-centric design.***

The course’s multi-layered technological-cum-pedagogical architecture—complete with lesson scripts, readings, glossaries, fact sheets, additional resources, formative and summative assessments—offers a rigorous and rich curriculum, yet one that can be accessed and adjusted to suit the learner’s own pace.

- ***This course adopts a collaborative and egalitarian model of teaching and learning.***

The course is co-written by the convenor of the Art History Minor, Dr. Priya Jaradi and a former student of the programme, Dylan Chng who is currently pursuing his doctoral studies at the Australian National University. *700 Years* is informed by the collaborative spirit and ethos that has driven NUS’s Art History Minor Programme since its launch in 2017. It is a rare example of how collaborative models produce critical, creative, and robust pedagogies.



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PROJECT STATISTICS



Duration and difficulty level of courses

Total duration of all lessons: **11 hours and 46 minutes**

Lesson	Duration	Difficulty
Introduction	10 minutes	★ Easy
Lesson 1	48 minutes	★ Easy
Lesson 2	1 hour 10 minutes	★ Easy
Lesson 3	1 hour 30 minutes	★★★★ Higher difficulty. Longer duration. This lesson engages a core art historical method. It sets the tone and foundation for L4.
Lesson 4	1 hour 46 minutes	★★★★ Higher difficulty. Longer duration. This lesson demonstrates the application of a core art historical method to a pre-modern Singaporean case-study. The lesson's creative and rigorous approach engages stories around a lion sighting and the naming of the island as Singhapura c. 1299.
Lesson 5	1 hour 8 minutes	★★ Moderate difficulty. This lesson requires your keen attention to understand the exchanges and overlaps between three kinds of textiles, i.e., batik, chintz, and patola. It problematizes conventional understandings of copies and forgeries.
Lesson 6	1 hour 24 minutes	★★ Moderate difficulty. Longer duration.
Lesson 7	1 hour 36 minutes	★★ Moderate difficulty. Longer duration.
Lesson 8	2 hours	★★ Moderate difficulty. Longer duration. If you are an NUS undergraduate learner, you may skip the last segment titled "Natural History (Re)Orientations: Ethnography and Orientalism, Reproducing and Returning the Colonial Gaze". This segment involves higher order thinking and application of visual and contextual analysis.
Conclusion	13 minutes	★★ Moderate difficulty. Longer duration.

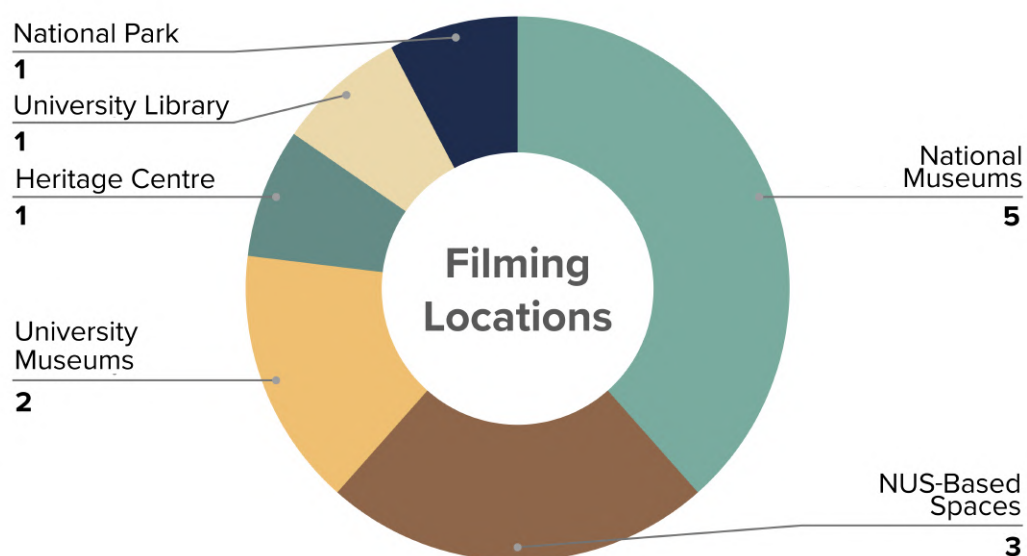
Number of days and work hours taken to produce the course

The course's research, scripting, storyboarding, filming, image permissions, and editing have taken close to **3 years** alongside our regular teaching and research commitments.

Recording hours for the course

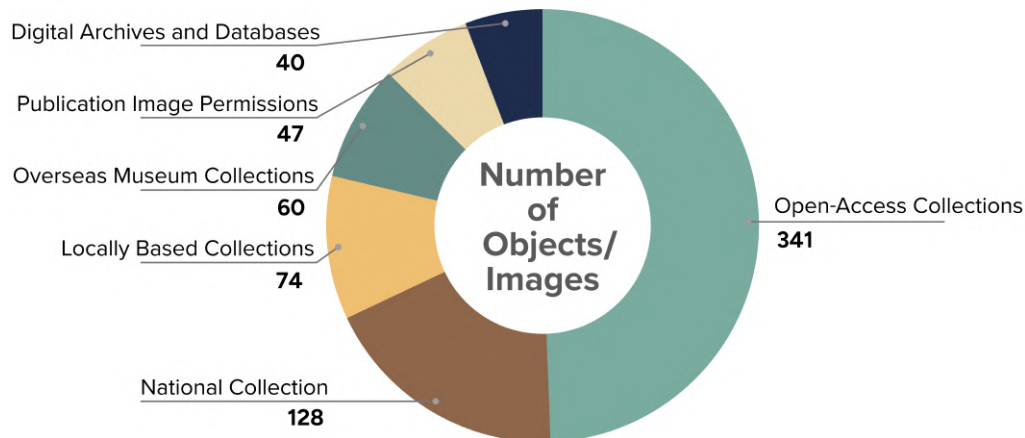
Studio Filming	28 Hours
On-location Filming	45 Hours
Voiceover Recording	21 Hours
Total Time	94 Hours

Location partners for the course



With the assistance of NUS's Centre for Teaching, Learning, and Technology (CTLT), significant portions of the course are delivered from important and visually rich locations in Singapore's (literal) arts landscape.

Number of artefacts/case-studies in the course



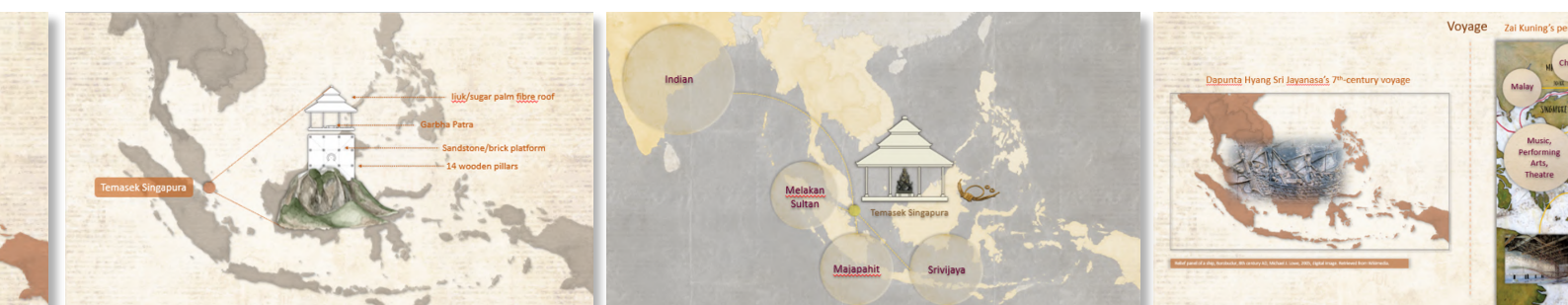
The course utilizes **over 700 images and objects** drawn from various sources.

- 128 objects and images from the National Collection over 8 decks, with a special focus on the Asian Civilisations Museum's Tang Dynasty Shipwreck, the National Museum of Singapore, The Peranakan Museum, and the Indian Heritage Centre.
- 74 objects and images from locally based collections, including those of the NUS Museum and the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum, the NUS Libraries, National Library Board, as well as other local collections such as the Collection of Shell Companies in Singapore.
- 60 objects and images from overseas museum collections, including but not limited to those of the Musée Barbier-Mueller, the National Gallery of Victoria, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the National Portrait Gallery, and the School of Oriental and African Studies.
- Images sourced from but not limited to scholars, private collectors, and artists such as Dr. John Guy (The Metropolitan Museum of Art), Dr. Michael Flecker (Belitung Shipwreck), Dr. Farouk Yahya (SOAS, University of London), Peter Lee, Zai Kuning, Ho Tzu Nyen, etc.

Illustrations in the course

Alongside relevant objects and artworks, the course is furnished with dynamic maps, infographics, conceptual visualisations, and animations.

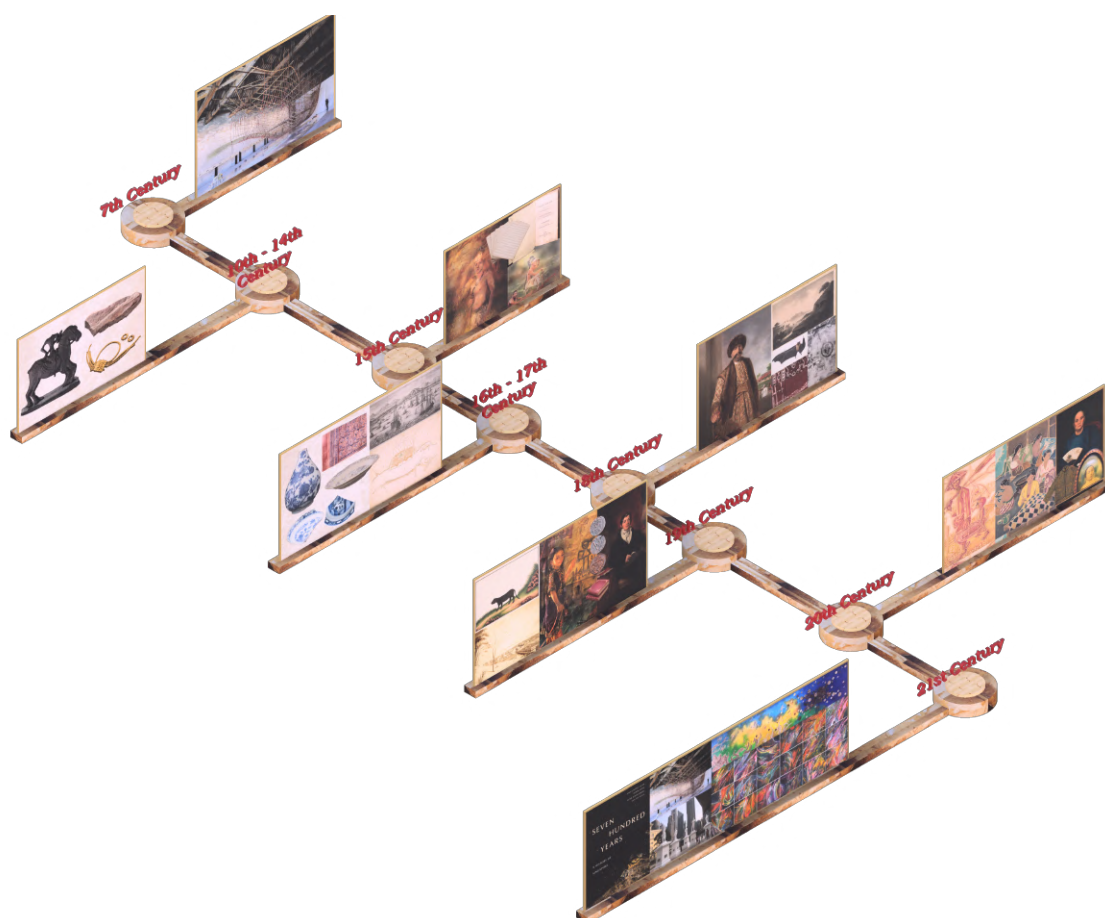
Teaching slides designed in-house	Over 900
Maps, infographics, and concept visualizations created by talented student assistants	Over 200



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DESIGNING AN ART HISTORY CURRICULUM FOR SINGAPORE

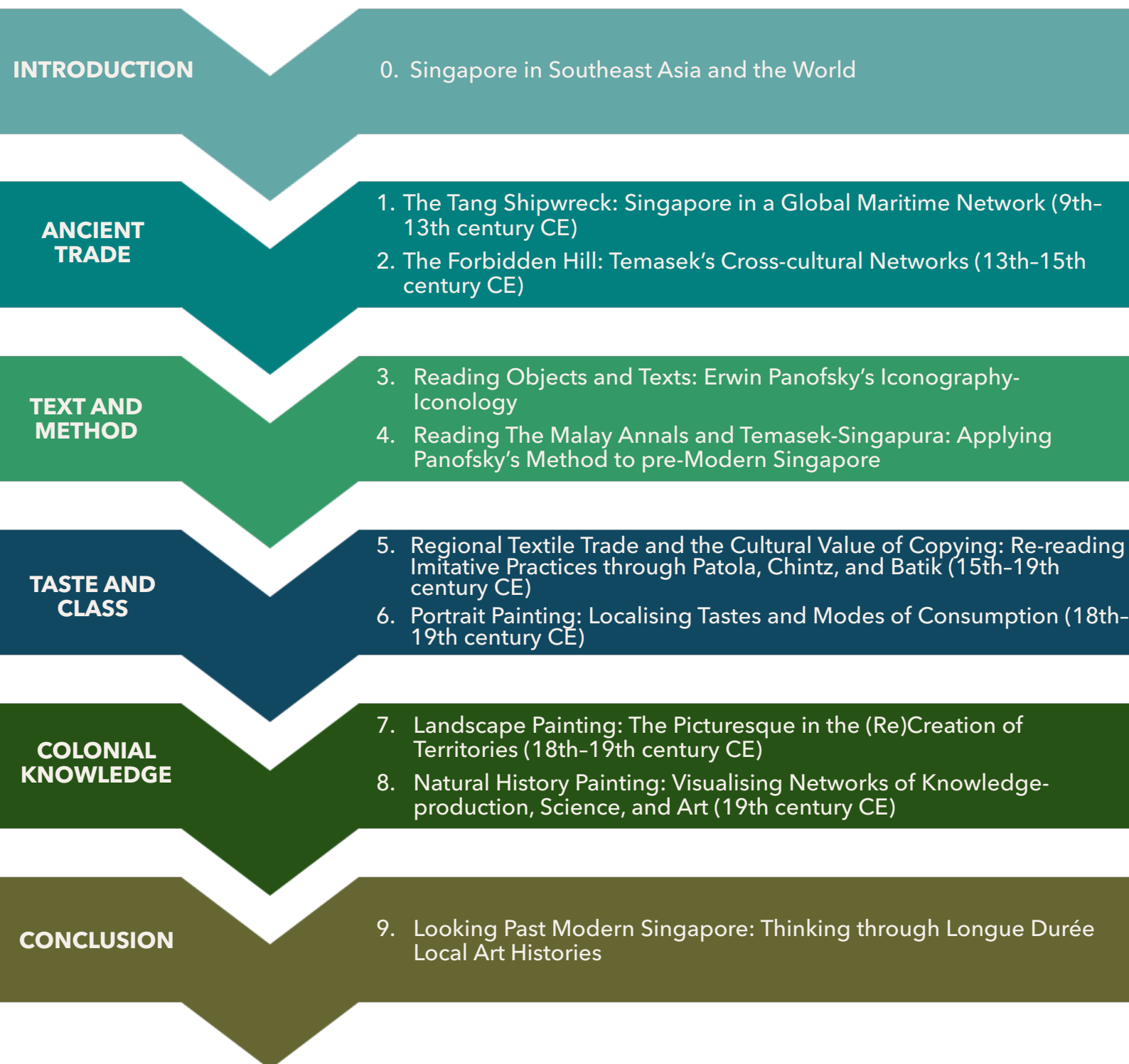
While pitched at an introductory level overall, *700 Years* is as complex an organism as its subtitle suggests. Situating our historically cosmopolitan Singapore within Southeast Asia while also contextualizing the latter, defined as a “region” of endless significant movement, is no small feat. The course accordingly emerges as a carefully crafted cross-section of select material and theoretical case studies, chronologically organized, but proceeding in tight thematic groupings.



The course unfolds broadly as a chronology but also challenges the simplicity of linear ways of conceiving the art of a region alongside its complex development.

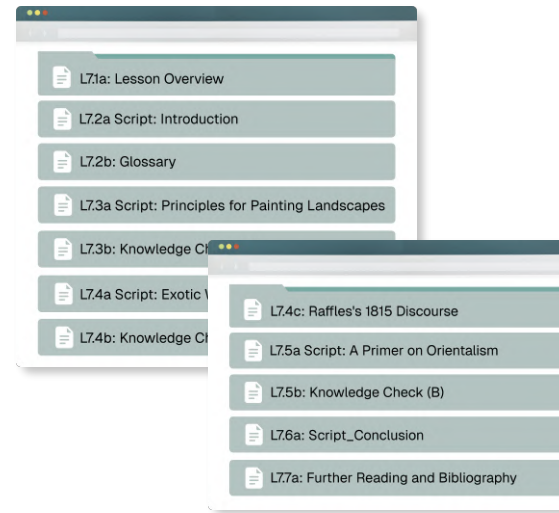
Course and Topic Structure

700 Years unfolds over eight lessons which are paired according to four key themes: Ancient Trade, Text and Method, Taste and Class, and Colonial Knowledge (see Fig. 1). Each lesson corresponds to a case-study, i.e., to an art object, medium, or genre drawn from Singapore's institutional collections. These primary case-studies are compared, contrasted, and drawn in a conversation with examples from other global institutions.



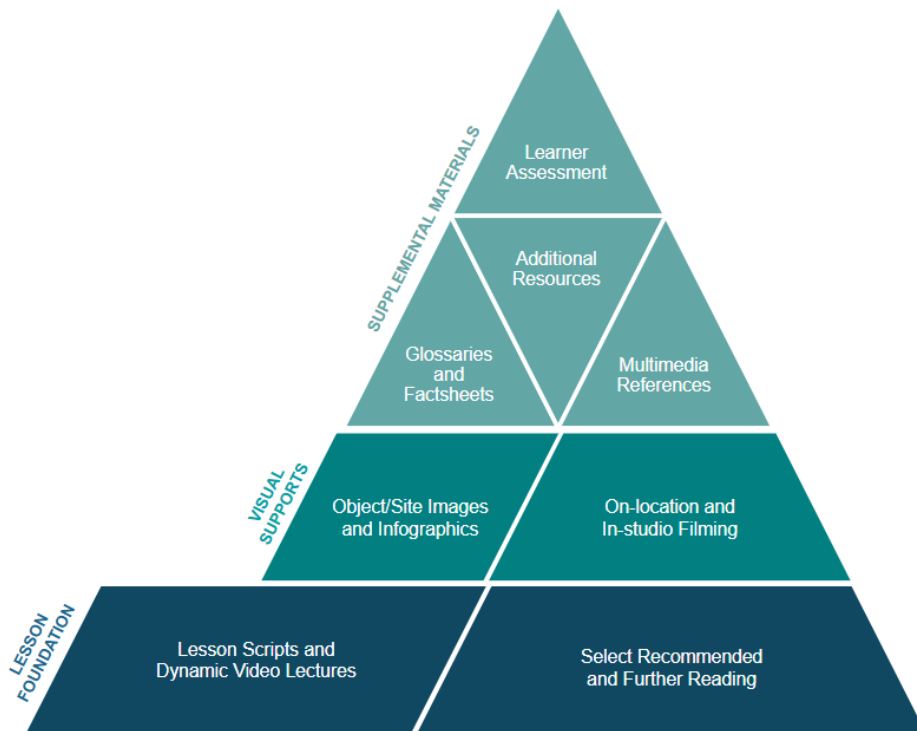
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LESSON ARCHITECTURE



Each of the 8 lessons is just as carefully crafted as the course’s overarching structure. On average, each lesson is divided into 4 to 6 smaller, learner-friendly units. Together, these units comprise foundational, supportive, and supplemental components designed to complement each other and even complicate lesson narratives.

In material terms, each lesson has at its core a video lecture divided into parts and supporting visuals which together present a specific point of view. Additional materials—developed in-house and/or sourced from reputable global art institutions—direct students to alternative perspectives and so encourage them to form their own points of view. These additional resources include 2 modes of assessment: (1) formative ungraded quizzes dispersed *between* lesson units and designed to support recall and retention; and (2) summative assessments *after* each lesson pair for learners to demonstrate their content knowledge and critical thinking.



A visualization of how each lesson in the course is constituted.

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LEARNING OUTCOMES

Acquire familiarity with the materials, genres, and styles of artistic production in Singapore and the region.

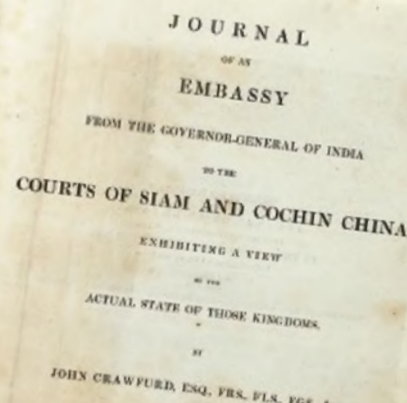
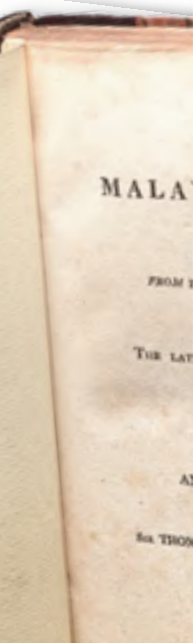
Relate aspects of artistic production in Singapore to developments within Southeast Asia and elsewhere.

Acquire familiarity with key methods, vocabularies, and concerns in art history, with specific reference to Singapore and Southeast Asia.

Acquire familiarity with Singapore's national (museum, archival, and university) collections.

Cultivate visual analysis skills for reading and interpreting a wide range of objects and artworks.

Employ vernacular texts and sources in the study of Singapore and the region's art.



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HOW TO ENROLL

If you are an NUS undergraduate student,

Find *700 Years of the Arts of Singapore* on: [NUSMods](#)

If you are an external learner,

Find *700 Years of the Arts of Singapore* on: [FASS Continuing Education & Training](#)



**AN INTRODUCTION TO ART
AND ART HISTORY WITH
REAL VISUAL IMPACT.**

CREDITS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Locations, Collections, and Resources

SINGAPORE

ASIAN CIVILISATIONS MUSEUM	NATIONAL PARKS BOARD (FORT CANNING PARK)
HERITAGE CONSERVATION CENTRE	NUS LIBRARIES
HO TZU NYEN	NUS MUSEUM
INDIAN HERITAGE CENTRE	PETER LEE
KEN CHEONG	ROBERT ZHAO
LEE KONG CHIAN NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM	SHELL COMPANIES IN SINGAPORE
MARSHALL CAVENDISH	SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM
MICHAEL FLECKER	THE PERANAKAN MUSEUM
NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF SINGAPORE	ZAI KUNING
NATIONAL ARTS COUNCIL	
NATIONAL GALLERY SINGAPORE	
NATIONAL HERITAGE BOARD	
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF SINGAPORE	

OVERSEAS

BRITISH LIBRARY	UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO
DUMBARTON OAKS	VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM
FAROUK YAHYA	WICHAI JUNTAVARO
ISLAMIC ARTS MUSEUM MALAYSIA	YALE UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY
JOHN GUY	

MALAY MANUSCRIPTS CENTRE, PERPUSTAKAAN NEGARA MALAYSIA
MUSÉE BARBIER-MUELLER
MUSEUM OF APPLIED ARTS AND SCIENCES, AUSTRALIA
NATIONAL GALLERY OF AUSTRALIA
NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA, MELBOURNE
NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY
NATIONAL VISUAL ARTS GALLERY OF MALAYSIA
ROYAL ACADEMY
ROYAL MUSEUMS GREENWICH (LONDON)
ROYAL MUSEUMS OF FINE ARTS OF BELGIUM
ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM
SOAS, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON
THE BRITISH MUSEUM
THYSSEN-BORNEMISZA MUSEO NACIONAL

Special Thanks

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PROFESSOR T.K. SABAPATHY	Department of Architecture

Image Captions

Cover:

Javanese-style gold jewellery discovered at Bukit Larangan, 14th century, H0.5 x Dia 10cm (Armlet). Collection of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.

Insets for map and timeline, pages 2 and 9:

Portrait of a lady in dress with lace sleeves and ruffle collar, n.d., probably Java, photograph, 47.8 x 27.8 cm. Collection of the NUS Museum, gift of Agnes Tan Kim Lwi. Image source: Page 172, *Inherited & Salvaged: Family Portraits from the NUS Museum Straits Chinese Collection* (2015).

Blue-and-white dishes for export to the Iranian market. Image source: Page 88, *The Tang Shipwreck: Art and exchange in the 9th century* (2023). Image courtesy: Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore.

Fatqua, *Hebe Serving Wine*, Guangzhou, China, ca. 1810–1815, reverse painting on glass after a European engraving. Collection of the Peabody Essex Museum. Retrieved from Wikimedia Commons.

Figurine of horse with rider, China, Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), earthenware with sancai glaze, 38.0 x 29.5 x 13.0 cm. Collection of the Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore. Gift of The Shaw Foundation.

John Adamson, *Portrait of Sir Thomas Stamford Bingley Raffles*, 1912, oil on canvas, 140 x 109 cm. Collection of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.

Bảo Ngộ, *Portrait of Annamese officer Đặng-huy-Trứ at Guangdong 1865* by Li Ruiyuan, 2012. Retrieved from Wikimedia Commons.

Raden Saleh, *Self Portrait*, 1841, oil on canvas, 21.5 x 26.5 cm. Collection of the National Museum of World Cultures, Rotterdam.

Tilly Kettle, *A portrait of Umdat al-Umara and Amir al-Umara, sons of Nawab Muhammad Ali of Arcot and the Carnatic*, ca. 1770, oil on canvas, 127 x 95 cm.

Dapunta Hyang: Transmission of Knowledge by Zai Kuning at the Singapore Pavilion in the Arsénale, 2017. Image courtesy: National Arts Council

Sketchfab 3D model of inscribed sandstone known as the 'Singapore Stone' (10th-14th century). Image courtesy: National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.

Javanese-style gold jewellery discovered at Bukit Larangan, 14th century, 0.5 x 10cm (Armlet), 0.5 x 2cm (Earring), 0.5 x (Earring). Collection of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.

Ho Tzu Nyen, *Utama – Every Name in History is I*, 2015, ink and acrylic on canvas, 20 x 28 cm. Image courtesy of the artist.

Ho Tzu Nyen, *Sang Nila Utama (from the Genealogy Series)*, 2003, ink on canvas with acrylic, 69 x 56 cm. Image courtesy of the artist and Kiang Malingue.

Malay Annals (Sejarah Melayu), 1821. Image courtesy: National Library Board, Singapore.

Tilly Kettle, *Shuja-ud-daula, Nawab of Oudh*, 1772, oil on canvas, 127.3 x 101.9 cm. Collection of the Yale Center for British Art.

Bhawani Das. *Great Indian Fruit Bat*. ca. 1777–1782. Pencil, ink, and opaque watercolor on paper, 59.7 x 83.2cm. Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, NY).

Anonymous Chinese artist. *Black tiger*. ca. 1808–1813. Watercolour on paper, 58 x 44 cm. Collection of the National Museum of Singapore.

Charles Dyce, *The Town and the Roadstead from Government Hill*, ca. 1842–1847, watercolour and ink on paper, 35.3 x 51.4 cm. Collection of the NUS Museum.

Pestonji Bomanjee, *Ragazza Parsi*, 1827, oil on canvas. Collection of the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Museum.

The History of Java (First Edition) by Thomas Stamford Raffles, London, 1817. Collection of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.

Chuah Thean Teng, *Untitled*, n.d., batik painting, 76.5 x 50.5 cm, Collection of the National Gallery Singapore, donated by S. Rajaratnam.

Unknown, *Ancestor portrait of Tan Kim Seng*, mid 19th century, oil on canvas, 98 x 78 cm. Collection of the Asian Civilisations Museum.

Liu Kang, *Batik Workers*, 1954, oil on canvas, 88.5 x 69 cm. Gift of the Loke Wan Tho Collection. Collection of National Gallery Singapore. Image courtesy of National Heritage Board, Singapore.

Seven Hundred Years: A History of Singapore, 2019. Cover of publication by Kwa Chong Guan, Derek Heng, Peter Borschberg and Tan Tai Yong. Published by National Library Board, Singapore and Marshall Cavendish International (Asia).

Flows and Contours in Tropical Asia, mural wall at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore, n.d. Photograph. Image courtesy of the National University of Singapore.

Sarkasi Said, *View of Life*, 2009, batik, 120 x 130 cm each. Gift of the Land Transport Authority. Collection of the NUS Museum.

Page 3:

Imitation patola cloth, late 19th–early 20th century, cotton with roller-print, 80 x 257 cm. Collection of the Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of Mr and Mrs Lee Kip Lee.

Souvenir hanging depicting a football game, ca. 1934, Dutch East Indies, Indonesia, drawn batik, 54 x 190 cm. Collection of the Asian Civilisations Museum, gift of Jan Veenendaal.

Page 4:

Green Décor Hu Ewer, North China, Tang Dynasty (618 - 907). Tang Shipwreck, Collection of the Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore.

Page 5:

Lim Kim Swee, *Ancestor portrait of Tan Keow*, 1898, watercolour, gouache and gold leaf on paper, 129 x 101 cm. Collection of NUS Museum, National University of Singapore, gift of Wee Lin.

Lim Kim Swee, *Ancestor portrait of Wee Boon Teck*, 1897 or 1899, watercolour, gouache and gold leaf on paper, 114.5 x 83.5 cm. Collection of NUS Museum, National University of Singapore, gift of Wee Lin.

Hossain Enas, *Sarawak Malay*, 1962, pastel on paper, 82 x 62 cm. Collection of Shell Plc.

Artist unknown, *Portrait of Tan Yong Neo (Mrs Chee Tye Cheng)*, ca. 1910, oil on canvas, 111 x 75 cm. Collection of NUS Museum, National University of Singapore, gift of Sharron Chee Guek Kee in memory of Chee Teng Kwee.

Page 12:

Sketchfab 3D model of Figurine (c. 14th century) - a rider on a horse - excavated from Empress Place site on 8 May 1998. Image courtesy: National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.

Hikayat Abdullah (Stories of Abdullah), 1849. Image courtesy: National Library Board, Singapore.

Malay Annals (Sejarah Melayu), 1821. Image courtesy: National Library Board, Singapore.

Journal of an Embassy from the Governor-General of India to the Courts of Siam and Cochin China by John Crawford, 1828. Image courtesy: National Library Board, Singapore.

Page 13:

Sacred Lotus, William Farquhar Collection of Natural History Drawings, early 19th century. Watercolour on paper, 44 x 56.5 cm. Collection of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board. Gift of Mr. G. K. Goh.

Anonymous Chinese artist. *Black tiger*. ca. 1808–1813. Watercolour on paper, 58 x 44 cm. Collection of the National Museum of Singapore.

Mouse Deer, William Farquhar Collection of Natural History Drawings. 1803–1818. Watercolour on paper, 46.1 x 28.9 cm (image), 58 x 44 cm (mount). Collection of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board. Gift of Mr. G. K. Goh.