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“The More We Get Together, The Happier We’ll Be”: Journey through the first-ever extensive exhibition on Singapore’s playgrounds by the National Museum

The More We Get Together: Singapore’s Playgrounds 1930 – 2030 brings visitors on a retrospective and prospective journey through 100 years of playground development in Singapore



Singapore, 20 April 2018 – Regardless of our different backgrounds, many of us who grew up and lived in Singapore have had a unique experience of playing at the ubiquitous playground. Playgrounds are an important source of our collective memories and identity – many of us will have fond memories of playing at the playgrounds and of the friends we made there. For the first time, in recognition of the significant social role that playgrounds play, the National Museum of Singapore, in collaboration with the Housing & Development Board (HDB), is recollecting those memories, while envisioning the future of such play spaces, in an extensive exhibition on the development of Singapore’s playgrounds.

The More We Get Together: Singapore’s Playgrounds 1930 – 2030 brings visitors on a retrospective and prospective journey through four vignettes that encapsulate the important

development of our local playgrounds. Spanning 100 years, the exhibition explores the evolving role of playgrounds in Singapore through the past and present, and invites visitors to ponder how such play spaces will continue to progress in the future.

Director of the National Museum of Singapore, Angelita Teo, said, “Many of us who grew up in Singapore will have fond memories of our time spent at the neighbourhood playgrounds. It is a place for fun and adventure, and where bonds and friendships are formed. With the exhibition, *The More We Get Together: Singapore’s Playgrounds 1930 – 2030*, we focus on these distinctive community spaces where people from different backgrounds gather, and uncover how the importance of playgrounds goes beyond their physical structures to include their place and meaning in our society.”

Director (Landscape and Design) of Housing & Development Board, Brian Low Lip Chee said, “Playgrounds are an integral part of HDB estates. They form part of our shared social space and play a significant role in bonding families and the community. In this exhibition, we celebrate the stories of our familiar playgrounds, and look forward to building more beautiful memories as HDB playgrounds continue to evolve in design and form.”

A journey through 100 years

The exhibition was developed in consultation with various community stakeholders and industry partners. Its narrative is told through the perspectives of individuals who have played a role in the design and development of these spaces, as well as through the perspectives of the community that they were built for. As part of this process, the National Museum engaged close to 120 Singaporeans from all walks of life, including families and even children, over six dialogue sessions.

The journey through the exhibition begins as visitors step into Singapore in the early 20th century, where designated playgrounds were few and far between, and children made do with playing in any open space they could find. It was also during this period that community-initiated playgrounds began emerging in areas such as People’s Park, Dhoby Ghaut and Katong Park. In the 1950s and 1960s, playgrounds quickly became an integral element in Singapore’s public housing estates. These initially comprised mainly functional play equipment such as slides, swings and see-saws. As the exhibition transitions into the 1970s and 1980s, visitors will see some of the familiar neighbourhood playgrounds in various forms and styles, designed and built by HDB from 1974 to 1993. Visitors will also be treated to exclusive video interviews with Singapore’s pioneer group of playground designers who sought inspiration from the physical landscape and everyday life, as well as heritage and culture, to create distinctly Singapore playgrounds that the community could

relate to. For the first time, visitors will be able to view 12 original blueprints of Singapore's iconic mosaic playgrounds by Mr Khor Ean Ghee, HDB's first playground designer, including the well-known Toa Payoh dragon playgrounds.

Visitors are then whisked into the 1990s and 2000s, which saw a need for playgrounds to offer more adventurous yet safe play for thrill-seekers. This led to the writing of playground standards and the rise of a new industry of Singaporean playground companies, such as Playpoint and CT-Arts, whose playground equipment are also featured in the exhibition. During this period, playgrounds shifted from catering primarily to the needs of children to being a more inclusive community space which catered to the elderly, adults and children. Children playgrounds were placed together with or in close proximity to fitness facilities, creating intergenerational spaces that brought the community together. The final vignette of the exhibition brings visitors into the future, inviting them to imagine their ideal playground and how such play spaces will continue to be an expression of our community identity. To realise these aspirations, the National Museum worked with students from the Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD) and young local creatives such as programmers and illustrators to develop an interactive, digital installation that allows visitors to "design" their ideal playground of 2030. The installation will present a collective image of what Singaporeans envision their future playgrounds to be, based on an amalgamation of the individual designs created by visitors to the exhibition.

An exhibition where everyone gets to 'play'

The More We Get Together: Singapore's Playgrounds 1930 – 2030 incorporates immersive and interactive features to engage visitors of all ages. Presented in conjunction with the exhibition is the museum's first-ever inclusive installation for toddlers by acclaimed French artist Matali Crasset. Titled *The Dynamic Lines of Our Nest*, this installation at the museum's Main Rotunda takes inspiration from the architectural design of the rotunda itself, as well as a species of Australian pine tree (*Casuarina equisetifolia*) that is native to Singapore, and is meant to reflect a future play space where the natural and man-made meet, and families gather and socialise. The installation is supported by Institut Français Singapour and Voilahn! French Festival Singapore 2018.

Other in-gallery activities include a mosaic wall where visitors can pen their playground memories, and a poll on their favourite mosaic playground design, in which visitors have a chance to walk away with a 3D-printed model of the winning design every month. Children can also enjoy climbing on a rope play structure that is adapted from the rope pyramid in West Coast Park, one of the tallest play climbing structures at the time when it was built in 2000. There will also be hands-on opportunities to test safety equipment used by playground inspectors and to "play" on re-imagined

versions of familiar playground equipment created by SUTD students, such as a see-saw that tilts only when someone sits on it and a swing for three.

Families can also look forward to picking up a “playbook” designed for children aged 5 to 12 and the young at heart to embark on a journey of discovery through the exhibition and its outdoor playground, complete with hands-on activities.

The exhibition opens with a fun-filled weekend of activities on 21 and 22 April. The museum’s grounds will be transformed into a playground with “Bouncy Adventures” – beautiful inflatable playgrounds inspired by iconic playgrounds designs of yesteryear, and various animal springers. Visitors can also look forward to artist workshops, film screenings, a chance to win miniature 3D models of iconic playgrounds, as well as balloon sculptures and craft-making sessions for the family. Throughout the exhibition period, the National Museum will also present programmes that look at Singapore’s playgrounds past, present and future from the perspective of architects, photographers, play specialists and designers. Visitors can also look forward to exclusive after-hour tours, toddler programmes, “date nights”, and a special dialogue session on future playgrounds. There will also be a “hackathon” for youths to pick up 3D-modelling skills and design their ideal future playground.

Looking to the future, starting with the first museum playground in Singapore

From the first public playgrounds in 1928 to HDB’s first community-built playground at Canberra in Sembawang in 2018, Singapore’s playgrounds continue to be an expression of our community identity. The public creations and feedback from this exhibition will guide the conceptualisation and design of the National Museum’s first-ever permanent playground that will be constructed in 2019 near the museum’s iconic Banyan Tree.

The More We Get Together: Singapore’s Playgrounds 1930 – 2030 runs till 30 September 2018 at the Stamford Gallery. Admission is free. For more information, please refer to the Editor’s Notes and Exhibition Highlights, or visit www.nationalmuseum.sg

The More We Get Together: Singapore’s Playgrounds 1930 – 2030 is presented by the National Museum, an institution of the National Heritage Board, in collaboration with the Housing & Development Board, and supported by RSP Architects Planners and Engineers Pte Ltd, Playpoint (Singapore) Pte Ltd, CT-Art Creation Pte Ltd, Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth.

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About the National Museum of Singapore

With a history dating back to its inception in 1887, the National Museum of Singapore is the nation's oldest museum with a progressive mind. Its galleries adopt cutting-edge and multi-perspective ways of presenting history and culture to redefine conventional museum experience. A cultural and architectural landmark in Singapore, the Museum hosts innovative festivals and events all year round—the dynamic Night Festival, visually arresting art installations, as well as amazing performances and film screenings—in addition to presenting thought-provoking exhibitions involving critically important collections of artefacts. The programming is supported by a wide range of facilities and services including F&B, retail and a Resource Centre. The National Museum of Singapore re-opened in December 2006 after a three-year redevelopment. It refreshed its permanent galleries and re-opened them in September 2015 for Singapore's Golden Jubilee. In 2017, it celebrated its 130th anniversary. For more details, please visit www.nationalmuseum.sg.

About Housing & Development Board

The Housing & Development Board (HDB) is the public housing authority in Singapore. Born in a crisis to address an acute housing shortage situation, HDB has today successfully housed more than 80 percent of Singapore's resident population in well-designed apartments located in comprehensively planned towns and estates. Beyond the hardware of public housing, the fostering of bonds between communities is also of utmost importance to HDB. HDB's efforts in housing a nation has earned much international acclaim, including the 2010 United Nations Habitat Scroll of Honour Award. For more information, visit www.hdb.gov.sg.

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