



FLASHES OF MEMORY

An Archival Tour

by LEX LEE and ZOE ZOU

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Flashes of Memory: An Archival Tour aims to collect and resurface archival impulses and traces across the Resource Library and NUS Museum's displays. Drawing on books, exhibition brochures, and personal ephemera from T.K. Sabapathy's archives, as well as works featured in *Radio Malaya: abridged conversations about art*, this tour rethinks and explores how we conceptualise archives, and how archives exist both as semi-autonomous objects and as intersubjective assemblages situated in exhibition space.

How do archival practices intersect with subjective acts of remembrance? How might one construe and present the afterlives of a performance or exhibition? Through this tour, audiences are encouraged to read archival qualities across a broad range of materials and to consider the complication of historical narratives through archival practices and traces that introduce fragments of subjective memory.

Resource Library

T.K. Sabapathy

Archives



1 Jorge Luis Borges, *The Total Library* (1999).

2 Alan Moore, Dave Gibbons, John Higgins, *Watchmen* (1987).

3 Patrick Ng Kah Onn, Excerpt from *Untitled* poem (undated).

4 Galeri Petronas, Invite for the official launch of *Piyadasa: The Malaysian Series* (2007).

5 Raffles Hall and the Architectural Society, *Artists & Critics* (1989).

Windows Spotighting Textual and Archival Pathways:

i Introduction to the T.K. Sabapathy Archives

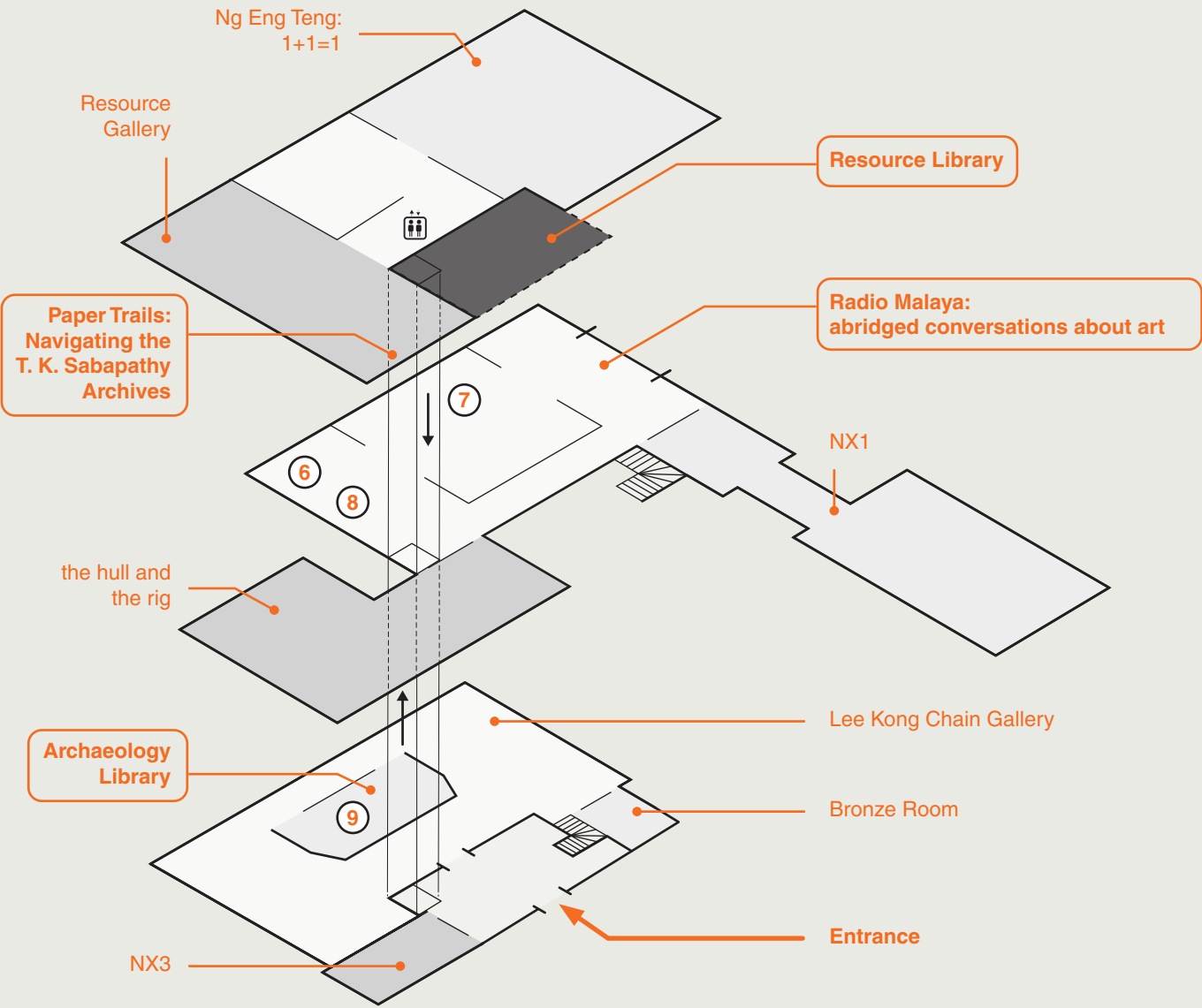
ii Drawing Practice:
Reading Ng Eng Teng's
Sketchbooks

iii Practices of Reading

3 5

NUS Museum Floor Map

- 6 Jose Tence Ruiz, documentation from *Without It, I'm Invisible* (1993).
- 7 Michael Lee, *Sites of Manoeuvre* (2013).
- 8 Ho Soon Yeen, *Monkey ♀ Thinker* (1992).
- 9 Archaeology Library



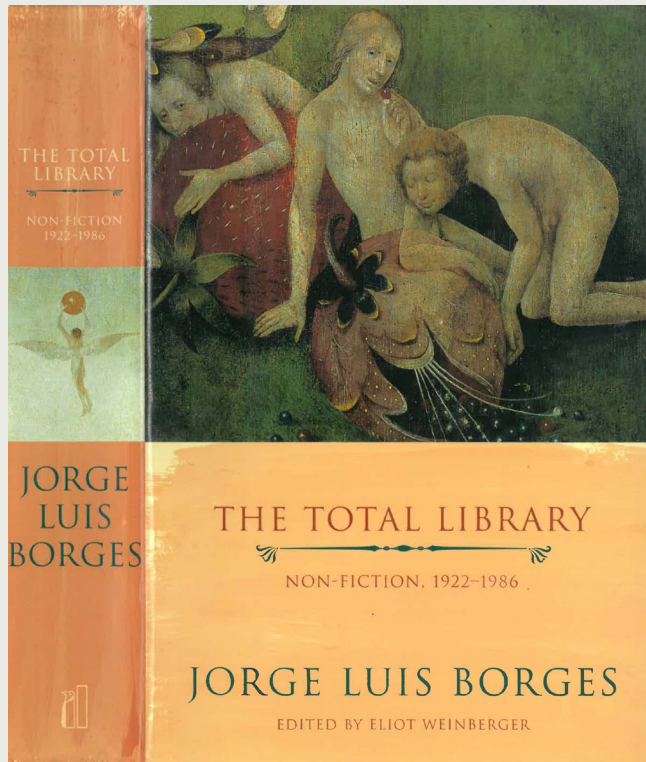
The Total Library

1

"Over time, one's memory forms a disparate library, made of books or pages whose reading was a pleasure..."

The Total Library by Jorge Luis Borges is one of the books in T.K. Sabapathy's personal collection, located within the Resource Library alongside other titles on philosophy, art history, and fiction. The book's title questions our representation of a "library". Tracing Borges's non-fiction essays from 1922 to 1986, the volume contains his reflections on canonical works, functioning too as a catalogue of world literature. Reflective and diverse, we consider the library as a generative ground, especially in the Resource Library, where alphabetical stacking invites new interpretive possibilities.

Jorge Luis Borges, *The Total Library* (1999).
From the archives of T.K. Sabapathy, donated to NUS Museum.



Alan Moore, Dave Gibbons, John Higgins, Excerpt from *Watchmen* (1987). From the archives of T.K. Sabapathy, donated to NUS Museum.

Watchmen

2

"All we ever see of stars are their old photographs."

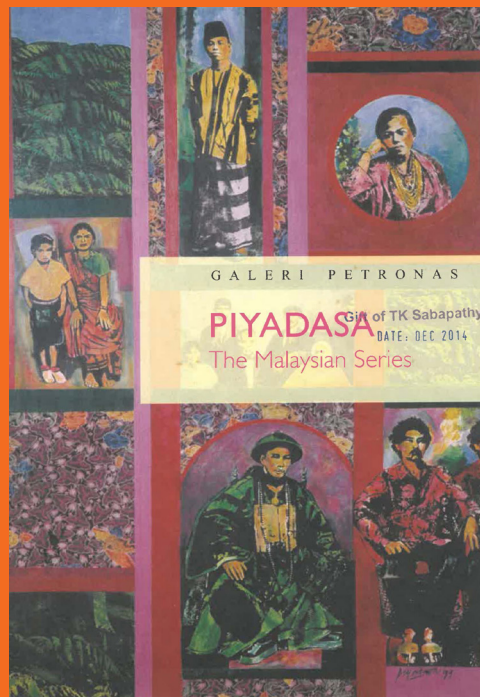
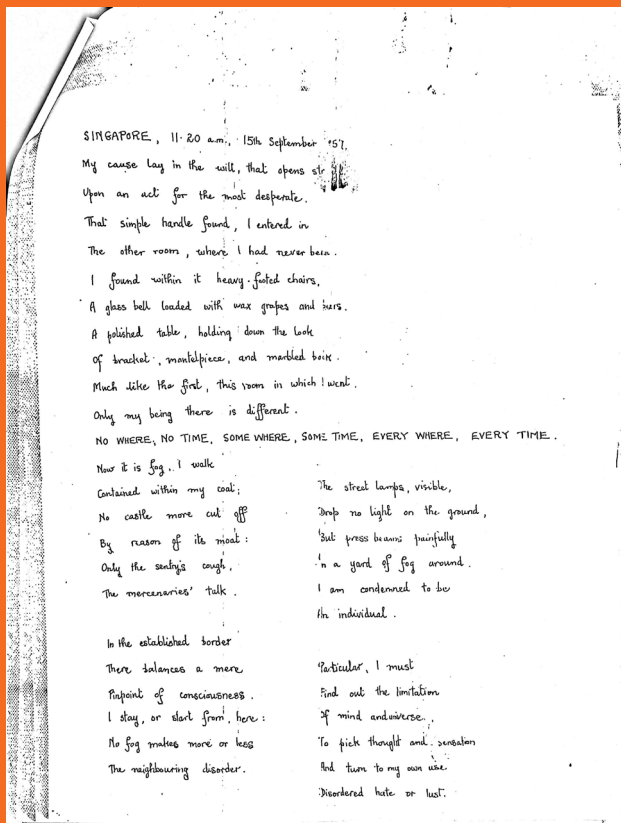
Alan Moore's *Watchmen* occupies a unique space on the shelves of the T.K. Sabapathy Archives, both visually and thematically. It asks the question: Who watches the watchers? A reflexive graphic novel for its own genre, it is canonical in the same way that many of the books here are for their fields. *Watchmen* highlights the diversity of materials present on the shelves and in Prof. Sabapathy's influences. The photographs and documentation of the past captured within the Archives are myriad, and perhaps in them we may catch a glimpse of the stars.

Patrick Ng Poem

3

Apart from books, the Resource Library also houses archival materials tied to Prof. Sabapathy's personal life, provisionally organised within black boxes containing letters, manuscripts, and other ephemera. Among these is a three-page handwritten poem by the Malaysian poet and painter Patrick Ng Kah Onn, prominent in the 1950s. The poem sheds light on the subjective experiences of grappling with the complexities of the Singapore-Malaysia separation. Lacking concrete provenance and date, the poem also presents an instance of archival ambiguity that invites speculative engagement and research by curators and historians.

Patrick Ng Kah Onn, Excerpt from **Untitled** poem (undated).
From the archives of T.K. Sabapathy, donated to NUS Museum.



Galeri Petronas, Invite for the official launch of **Piyadasa: The Malaysian Series** (2007). From the archives of T.K. Sabapathy, donated to NUS Museum.

Pamphlets for Piyadasa: The Malaysian Series

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Alongside the more familiar books, visibly distinguished by their placement within file organisers, are loose pamphlets collected over many years. In his interwoven roles as art historian-curator-educator, Prof. Sabapathy has gathered various ephemera of the art world, lightweight materials that bear the weight of memory-gone-by and outline relationships forged. The decade-long relationship between Sabapathy and artist-curator-educator Redza Piyadasa, their mutual observance and writings across topics such as Nanyang Art, the shared space in the art world they carved out as thinkers, writers, and collaborators, only dregs of that are manifested within these four copies of a pamphlet and invitation to an exhibition celebrating Piyadasa's legacy. How do we grasp at these stars whose light remains only in old photographs?

Artists & Critics Magazine

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The paperback magazine of *Artists & Critics*, part of the archival collection of Prof Sabapathy, further testifies to his key connections with local artists. Published by Raffles Hall and the Architectural Society of NUS, this issue features Amanda Heng on its cover, a key member of The Artists Village, a contemporary art group initiated in the late 1980s and known for its experimental, socially aware approach to performance art. It includes interviews, opinion essays, and artist biographies, with Prof. Sabapathy contributing a short essay titled “Alternative Spaces, Alternative Strategies”. The magazine documents close artist-critic relationships and helps preserve a sense of art contemporary to their specific time.

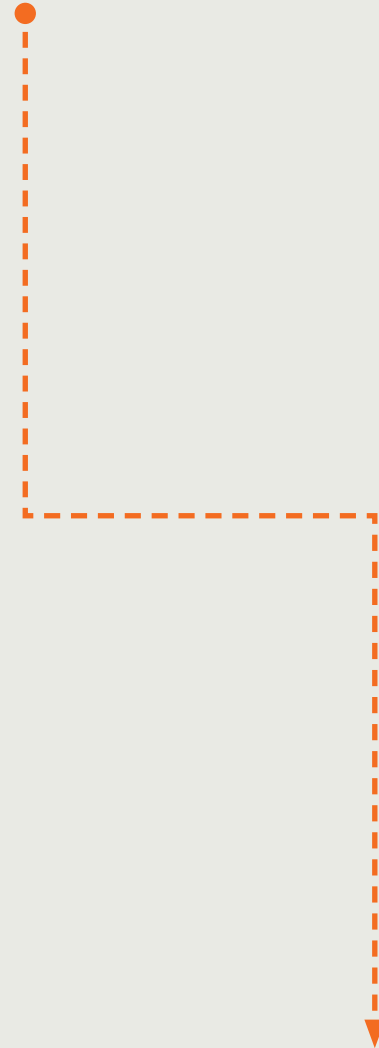
Raffles Hall and the Architectural Society,
Artists & Critics (1989). From the archives of
T.K. Sabapathy, donated to NUS Museum.



Resource Library

T.K. Sabapathy Archives

Top Level



Concourse

Radio Malaya:

abridged conversations about art



In *Radio Malaya: abridged conversations about art*.

Jose Tence Ruiz, documentation from
Without It, I'm Invisible (1993).

Without It, I'm Invisible

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Within the exhibition *Radio Malaya: abridged conversations about art*, a series of photographs documenting the 1993 performance by Filipino artist Jose Tence Ruiz is on display. The performance features Ruiz in a bandaged white suit, a reference to the film adaptation of H.G. Wells's *The Invisible Man*. The work reflects Singapore's turn-of-the-millennium society under technological acceleration—clean, efficient, and yet increasingly impersonal. Experiencing the work through archival photographs raises questions of the afterlife of performance: how do archival photographs serve as traces of memory, yet not fully capture it?

Sites of Manoeuvre

7

The archival photograph takes physical presence in Michael Lee's *Sites of Manoeuvre*, recreating long-gone Singaporean exhibition spaces in 3D space through acrylic and light that conspicuously omits the presence of the artworks. Without the artworks, the exhibition layout and visitors become the focal point, precisely arranged in grid coordinates that point to a past and present curation. We can consider how the manoeuvres we make within curated museum space leave traces in the archives, and is presented as part of an artwork too.

In *Radio Malaya: abridged conversations about art*.

Michael Lee, *Sites of Manoeuvre* (2013);
Acrylic cut outs on lightboxes, dimensions variable.





In *Radio Malaya*: abridged conversations about art.

Ho Soon Yeen, *Monkey ♀ Thinker* (1992);
Ink on paper, 127 x 96 cm.

Monkey ♀ Thinker

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Similarly invested in the politics of the body is *Monkey ♀ Thinker*, part of a series of ink self-portraits by Singaporean artist Ho Soon Yeen. Produced during a twelve-hour performance, the work records the artist scrutinising her body hourly through painting. On the right side of the painting, Ho documents the work's duration and the specific time of its completion: 12:50 am. Through these archival-like inscriptions, the work dissolves the boundary between artwork and archive. Could the artwork itself function as an archive, and the archive as artwork?

Radio Malaya:

abridged conversations about art

Top Floor

Lower Level

Archaeology Library

Archaeology Library

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Beginning from the Resource Library, this itinerary leads from existing reality to the counterfactual: the second and only other library in NUS Museum. The Archaeology Library is a library on display, holding potsherds and ceramic fragments from various archaeological dig sites, allowing visitors to walk amongst vitrines and display troughs, in contrast to the Resource Library's shelves and closed doors. What makes these two libraries so different? What precludes this configuration of materials underfoot and on

display for the T.K. Sabapathy Archives? At this inconclusive stepping-off point, we invite prospecting of what an archive can be, what archive materials can be. Can a book too be a potsherd? How are libraries archives, and archives libraries?

Gallery view of Archaeology Library,
NUS Museum (2020).



NUS Museum is a university museum that advances critical inquiry, interdisciplinary learning, and experimental curatorial practices. Positioned within the National University of Singapore and focused on Southeast Asian and Asian visual cultures, the Museum serves as a platform for teaching, research, and dialogue across disciplines. Through collections-based inquiry, collaborative partnerships, and reflective exhibition-making, it fosters new ways of engaging histories, shaping knowledge, and contributing to regional museological discourse.



NUS
National University
of Singapore

Museum

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OPENING HOURS:

Monday: By appointment (for schools/faculties)
Tuesday to Saturday: 10:00 am – 6:00 pm
Sunday and Public Holidays: Closed