



STUDENT-LED TOURS

MOTHER!

Femininity, Companionship, and
Kin-keeping

by KYLA TEO

MOTHER!

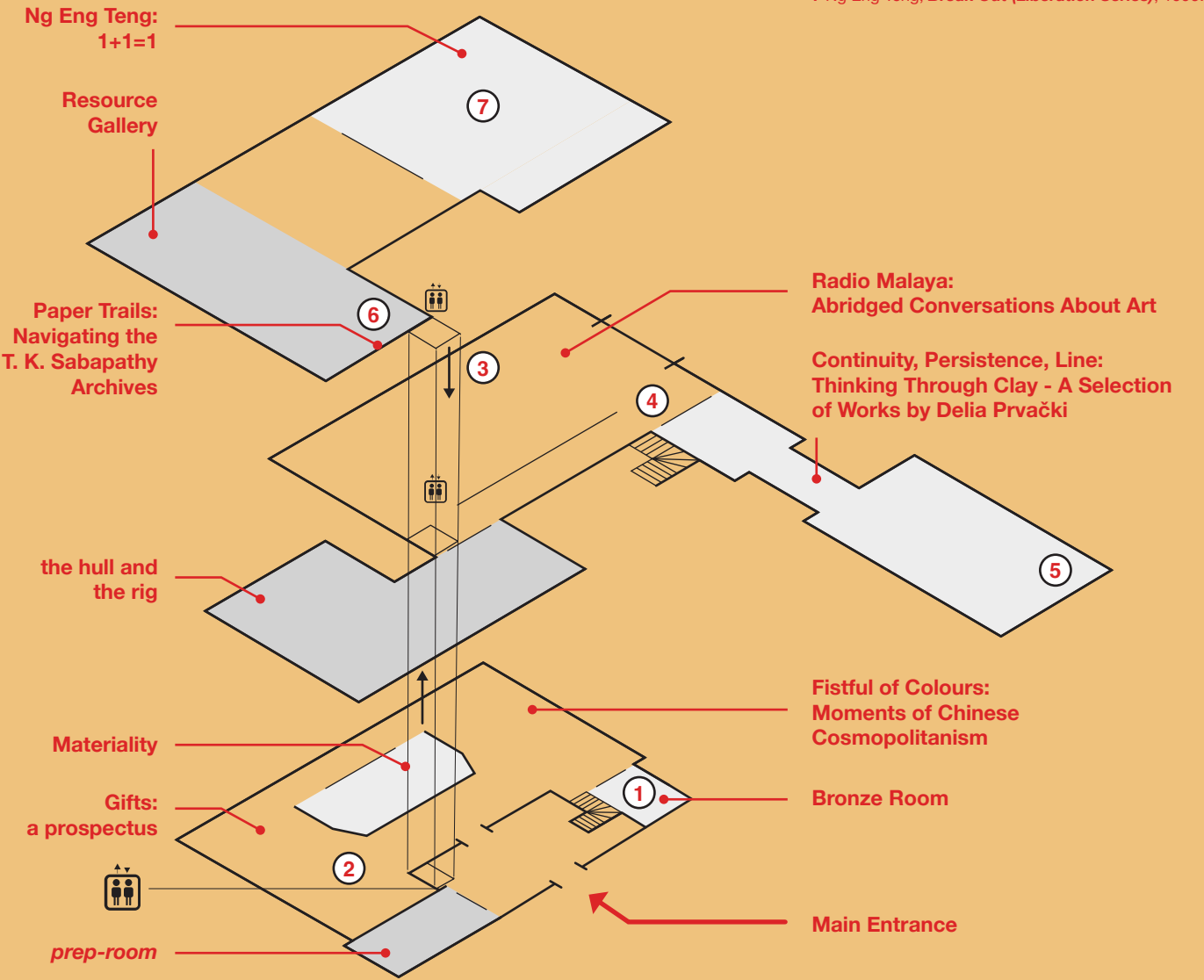
Femininity, Companionship, and Kin-keeping

Mother!: Femininity, Companionship, and Kin-keeping reflect on the responsibilities and expectations women face in different stages of their lives. Loosely following a woman's traditional life path, the tour begins with symbols of marriage and is followed by motherhood, feminine friendships, labour, and ageing. While portrayals of women are often separated into the roles of the wife, the mother, the friend, and the individual, this tour encourages the perception of the feminine as a dynamic concept. As women take up traditional roles, they labour and age, inevitably straying from the 'perfect woman' yet still being expected to fulfill their duties perfectly. In ruminating on the relationships women form with others, this tour aims to celebrate the ugly and the beautiful, as well as the strength and softness of femininity.

On Cover:
Wee Kong Chai, *Mother and Child*,
1959; Oil on canvas, 79 x 139 cm.

NUS MUSEUM

FLOOR MAP



- 1 *Gilt Bronze Mask*, Liao Dynasty, 907 - 1125.
- 2 Ng Eng Teng, *Mother and Child II*, Undated.
- 3 Wee Kong Chai, *Mother and Child*, 1959.
- 4 Lim Mu Hue, *Those who are not involved view the matter clearer*, 1956.
- 5 Delia Prvački, *Ageing*, 1998.
- 6 Redza Piyadasa, *Baba Family*, Undated.
- 7 Ng Eng Teng, *Break Out (Liberation Series)*, 1996.

GILT BRONZE MASK

1

This gilt bronze mask likely belonged to a wealthy *Yelu* woman in the *Liao* dynasty when she married into the *Xiao* clan. According to tradition, *Yelu* women were expected to cut ties with her family following marriage. However, before parting ways, her parents would gift her a set of burial clothes, including a mask like this one. Given that marriage is often seen as a rite of passage, this object symbolises an aspect of the practice of marriage, serving as an introduction into the life and cycle of womanhood.



In Bronze Room.

Gilt Bronze Mask, Liao Dynasty,
907 - 1125; Bronze, 19 x 21 cm.



In Gifts: a prospectus.

Ng Eng Teng, **Mother and Child II**,
Undated; Stoneware, oil paint, lacquer, 17 x 21 x 10.5 cm.

MOTHER & CHILD II

2

Mother and Child II by Ng Eng Teng presents a mother holding her child in her embrace. The texture of this sculpture is rough, hinting at the tumultuous feelings of a new mother. We may also interpret the lines across her legs as a mother bound to her child through motherhood and duty. This reflects the next stage in the traditional cycle of womanhood. Compared with the other phallic pieces in this glass vitrine, the stark modesty of this piece raises the concept of the Madonna-Whore complex.

As a woman grows into her own as a mother, we might consider why she is no longer perceived/ allowed to be a sexual being.



In Radio Malaya: Abridged Conversations About Art.

Wee Kong Chai, ***Mother and Child***, 1959; Oil on canvas, 79 x 139 cm.

MOTHER & CHILD

3

Mother and Child by Wee Kong Chai shares its title with the previous object, and are similar in their portrayals of motherhood. This piece depicts a mother carrying her child on her back while bending down to pick something up. This simultaneous performance of two forms of labour seems strenuous, highlighting the idea of kin-keeping and invisible labour. The relatively empty background also prioritises the relationship between mother and child within the family unit, and creates a sense of fatigue and loneliness.

How do class and labour intersect with the responsibilities different women are expected to hold in motherhood?

THOSE WHO ARE NOT INVOLVED VIEW THE MATTER CLEARER

4

Those who are not involved view the matter clearer by Lim Mu Hue is a woodblock print showing two women competing in a game of *congkak* while a third friend watches over the game. The seaside background includes clothes drying on trees and baby cradle nets, highlighting the continuous labour and duties women partake in as they enjoy recreational activities. The title may also serve as a play on words, hinting at the valuable insights women might have from their exclusion from spheres of power.

How does this compare to the piece below this titled, *Persuading*?



In Radio Malaya: Abridged Conversations About Art.

Lim Mu Hue, ***Those who are not involved view the matter clearer***, 1956; Ink on paper, 20.5 x 15.2cm.



*In Continuity, Persistence, Line: Thinking Through Clay
- A Selection of Works by Delia Prvački.*

Delia Prvački, **Ageing**,
1998; Terracotta, oxides, 120 x 136 x 10 cm.

AGEING

5

Ageing by Romanian-born Singaporean artist, Delia Prvački, serves as an ode to her 48 years of life. Having experienced war, displacement and motherhood, the increasing lines across the 48 tiles highlight the physical and emotional scars she attained over the years. The gradual increase in height, and darkening shade of the tiles resemble bread baking in the oven, a common metaphor for pregnancy.

Despite the scars, bread, which often symbolises sustenance and fulfilment, adds a positive note to this piece. This serves as an internal reflection of Prvački's relationship with herself and her past, providing a nuanced portrayal of a woman from her own perspective.

BABA FAMILY

6

Baba Family by Redza Piyadasa is a woodblock print reproduced from a photo of a Jawi Peranakan family. It finally presents a woman within the same physical space as a man, but highlights the roles they each play through body language. The man cuts an imposing patriarchal figure as he stands over the family, while the mother is presented as a central figure surrounded by her children. This highlights the primacy of the woman in childrearing within the traditional family unit. We also see the cyclical aspect of womanhood, as she raises her daughter, who will come to experience the duties of womanhood too.



In *Paper Trails: Navigating the T. K. Sabapathy Archives*.

Redza Piyadasa, *Baba Family*,
Undated; Print on paper, 58.8 x 41 cm.



In *Ng Eng Teng: 1+1=1*.

Ng Eng Teng, *Break Out*
(*Liberation Series*),
1996; Stoneware, glaze, gold
paint, 59 x 27 x 31 cm.

BREAK OUT

7

Breakout (*Liberation Series*) by Ng Eng Teng follows the recurring motif in his torso-to-face series, but depicts the torso/ face to be bound. The interview excerpt between Ng and Constance Sheares next to the sculpture hints that the piece represents the “difficulty of getting out of being what you are”. The phallic form of this piece combined with the breast-shaped eyes creates a more gender-neutral individual. Optimistically, it represents modern attempts at breaking out of the traditional cycle of girlhood, womanhood, and motherhood. Simultaneously, the recognisable motif of the torso/ body pessimistically suggests the individual under the layer of binds is inherently one that is bound by itself. This reflects the continued oppression of different individuals within the female community. And that while the individual may attempt to break out, they have not actually broken out. This highlights the ambiguity of the modern day, and encourages optimism, albeit a wary one.

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