



Among the rare handmade textiles that Professor Lim Tow Keang has donated to NUS Museum is a ceremonial textile from the Iban tribes of Borneo, known as the pua. PHOTOS: LIANHE ZAOBAO



RSP Architects Planners and Engineers, represented by director Mark Wong, was recognised for developing a purpose-built space for the elderly within the National Museum of Singapore.

89 heritage patrons honoured for contributions worth nearly \$12m

They donated cash and artefacts on top of in-kind support for various heritage causes

Caelyn Tan

GIVING BACK

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PROFESSOR LIM TOW KEANG, on the 125 pieces of rare handmade textiles that he donated to NUS Museum.

One of Professor Lim Tow Keang's prized possessions is a ceremonial textile from the Iban tribes of Borneo, known as the pua.

Adorned with icons and symbols, cloth like this was used in the past by the Iban warriors to wrap the heads of their enemies, who believed that this was a way to contain their spirits, said Prof Lim, 70.

Women would use the pua to collect sometimes as many as 20 head trophies that warriors bring home after battle, he added.

The pua is one of 125 pieces of rare handmade textiles that Prof Lim, a respiratory and critical care senior consultant at the National

University Hospital, has donated to NUS Museum.

He was one of 89 patrons recognised at the National Heritage Board's annual Patron of Heritage Awards ceremony on Sept 24.

This is the highest number of patrons presented with awards at the annual ceremony in five years.

In 2023, these patrons contributed a total of \$11.67 million in cash and artefact donations, in addition to in-kind support for various heritage causes.

Referring to the pua he donated, Prof Lim said the textile was painstakingly made by hand. He pointed out that the threads are first spun by hand before being woven into the textile.

He added that the colours are from dyes extracted from various fruits, vegetables and flowers.

Asked why he decided to part with his collection, Prof Lim said he saw it as a way for him to contribute.

"My textiles will probably live longer than me," he said. "I see it as a gift from the people who made it. Now, I give it back (through the donation)."

He told *The Straits Times* that he began collecting traditional textiles more than 40 years ago when he was travelling in Indonesia.

Speaking at the ceremony on Sept 24, Minister for Culture, Community and Youth Edwin Tong expressed his gratitude to the award recipients.

"We have seen great generosity from patrons in the gifting of personal collections and, in some cases, cherished family heirlooms as well," he said, adding that their donations will contribute to the telling of a more compelling history of Singapore.

Another award recipient was architecture firm RSP Architects Planners and Engineers.

The firm was recognised for developing a purpose-built space for

the elderly within the National Museum of Singapore.

Called the Reunion Social Space and Cafe, the space is decorated with elements that are familiar to the older generation, like rattan and motifs of animals and plants, said RSP's director Mark Wong, 43.

Mr Wong said the space was designed with the elderly in mind, with features such as arm rests, so those in wheelchairs can easily transfer themselves onto chairs in the cafe.

At the moment, the space is used for a range of senior-friendly activities, including workshops and choir singing.

Mr Wong said he hopes that the award will inspire other people to also contribute to heritage causes. "Heritage and our culture really speak to our shared values and experiences as a people," he said.

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