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14. International Connections

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A large, detailed red stone lion sculpture is the central focus, perched on a multi-tiered pedestal. The lion is depicted in a seated, alert posture, facing right. Its mane is intricately carved with swirling patterns. The pedestal features decorative scrollwork. The scene is set outdoors, with lush green leaves and branches framing the sculpture against a bright, slightly blurred background.

"The week-long congress in Sydney and these two regional meetings were an inspiring example of the World Federation in action. The sharing of our experiences gave many of us a new and happy realisation that we have Friends around the world. It was a special pleasure for me to come to Singapore, talk with Margaret (White) and Kay (Anand-Sobti) again and relive the fun of the congress. I made many new friends and began to understand that each individual Friend gives something special of themselves to Singapore's museums in a wonderful kind of mini-world Federation of Friends."

- Carol Serventy, WFFM Vice President for Africa-Asia-Pacific

EXPORTING EXPERTISE

Many FOM members have only lived in Singapore for two or three years, a relatively short time, but the knowledge which they gained here has led in some instances to international acclaim through their own professional careers and activities.



Some have taken the FOM concept to other parts of the world. Nancy LeBaron revitalised the volunteer group for Kew Gardens in London and June Davey and others took the principles of the docent training programme to Hong Kong as well as to other museum locations. It is interesting that some of these 'exports' return - for instance a

number of our docents were first trained in Hong Kong and, since transferring to Singapore, have taken up key roles within our group.

ENLARGING HORIZONS

FOM in Singapore does not exist in a vacuum but is a member of the World Federation of Friends of Museums. This international organisation with federations and associations of Friends in over thirty countries represents more than two million volunteers supporting museums. WFFM was first mooted in 1967 and officially established with its first international congress in 1972. Its objectives are to encourage and support the setting up of Friends' groups and to facilitate the exchange of information between groups, through yearly council meetings and general assemblies and triennial congresses. In 1985 FOM joined

WFFM as an associate member and has continually benefited from the opportunities to learn from other Friends' groups around the world.

In 1999 a shift was made from being passive recipients of information to a more active role on the international scene, particularly under the leadership of Margaret White and Kay Anand-Sobti during their terms as presidents. They attended the 10th WFFM world congress held in Sydney where Margaret presented a paper on 'New Friends: New Future' and Kay made contact with Syed Mohamad Albukhary, director of the Islamic Arts Museum in Kuala Lumpur. Inspired by the congress it was decided to hold a meeting of *Friends across Asia* in Kuala Lumpur in 2000, jointly organised by Singapore and Malaysia. Delegates from Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam attended.

This proved to be an exciting start to our efforts to do more in Asia and gave us the opportunity to network not only with museum volunteers throughout the region but also to strengthen our ties with our colleagues in the National Heritage Board and other museum professionals. As we shared our challenges and our successes we learned to value our individual strengths.

The success of this meeting led to a second, 'Sharing the Spirit', in Singapore in 2001 - significantly the 'International Year of the Volunteer'. Keynote speeches, breakout workshops and informal social events ensued once more that those who came benefited immensely. On both occasions WFFM Vice President for Africa-Asia-Pacific, Carol Serventy came to give us the global perspective and she inspired us with her words.

Plans are currently in place for the next regional meeting to be held in 2004.

2000

- Opening of Heritage Conservation Centre (HCC)
- Representation at WFFM meeting in Prague
- First regional Friends' meeting, initiated by FOM and jointly organised with the Islamic Arts Museum, Kuala Lumpur
- MITA presents two FOM members with 'Special Recognition' awards

- FOM participates in guiding of the National Archives
- Introduction of 'Dear Friends' letter from the president in the newsletter
- FOM assists in the design of guided programme of HCC and guides first visitors and special guests



In 1998 we were elected to the council of WFFM for a six-year term to represent associate members. Council meetings are held in a different venue each year and since 2000 Julia Oh, FOM Past President and Advisor, has attended meetings in Prague, Oporto, Bruges and Oslo as our delegate. Other Singapore members have joined the programmes organised for the meetings as well as the WFFM congress in Buenos Aires, Argentina in 2002. In 2002 the council elected Julia as WFFM Secretary General for a three-year term, with responsibility to coordinate and communicate with the global membership.

This opportunity to act on a much wider scale has had many benefits, not only in raising our profile internationally but also in contributing significantly to strengthening WFFM and encouraging growth of Friends' groups.

groups. Closer ties have been established with our colleagues in the museum world through regular reporting sessions to ICOM, the International Committee of Museums.

THE FUTURE

We now have a significant role in a world-wide body. We have a membership with representatives from forty countries and we should be proud of our achievements and our influence as pathfinders and contributors to community service in Singapore and the world. Our growth in the past twenty-five years has been significant. We are now building on the opportunity to explore the many international avenues which are opening to us and continue to promote the work of Friends in support of museums.



2001

Year of the Volunteer

- Singapore hosts regional Friends' Southeast Asia conference *Friends Across Asia*
- Representation at WFFM meeting in Oporto, Portugal



- FOM participates in Colombo site archaeological excavation
- First *Friends' Art Show* held in SAM
- Friday evening lectures reintroduced