

On the trail of art in Singapore: Little India



Arty moooves

In the second of a three-part series, funky, thoughtful artworks are all around Little India, reflecting the neighbourhood's history and culture

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Street art fans can look forward to more art dotting the Little India neighbourhood as there are plans to add new murals as well as an outdoor installation at the new Tekka Place.

Over the last four years, murals

have been popping up in the heritage district better known for its food, shopping and temples than for contemporary art.

The proliferation of street art is thanks to the annual Artwalk Little India organised by Lasalle College of the Arts.

Senior fellow at Lasalle Milenko Prvacki, 68, recalls that he was approached by the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) to help curate art events during Singapore Art Week. Artwalk was born, an event put together by the school's BA (Hons) Arts Management students and featuring art by fresh graduates as well as alumni of the school.

The murals at Little India are dominated by funky, thoughtful

pieces that respond to the history and culture of the neighbourhood, which has been inhabited by Singapore's Indian community since it was so designated under British rule.

A spokesman for Little India Shopkeepers & Heritage Association (LISHA) says: "Artwalk has created an artsy vibe attracting younger patrons into Little India."

Prvacki says it took a while for the area's businesses to warm to the idea of paintings on the walls. "It was challenging in the beginning. Students did struggle to get the permissions in time and, at the same time, landlords preferred we whitewash all murals after Artwalk was over."

"But as the project becomes more established, more landlords now want to keep the murals for a longer time. Many now do not want to whitewash them and government agencies have supported us with permission not just for wall murals, but also for outdoor performances."

In fact, a neighbourhood kopitiam, Village Curry, was inspired by the art to hire an artist to decorate its walls and pillars with rustic scenes of Indian village life. A member of the staff says the murals have attracted more tourists to the shop.

Certainly on the morning The Straits Times visited the area, there were guides leading tourists around in the stifling heat, pointing out art alongside giving explanations about Little India's architecture and history.

The Lisha spokesman adds: "We have seen an increase in visitorship as the marketing efforts for Artwalk are supported by STB. This year, we had a lot more international attention."

Prvacki is pleased about the project's success. "I am most proud of the fact we are continuing to attract, inform and entertain international tourists as well as the local crowd. Of course, I am also equally proud of all the new murals coming our way that are yet to be painted."

Here is ST's cut-and-keep guide to 10 of the neighbourhood's funkiest murals. Remember to wear sunscreen and comfortable shoes as this walk takes in a large chunk of the area, beginning at Sungei Road and ending at Desker Road. Allocate about 1½ hours for an easy walking experience.

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10 artworks to catch

1. PRETTY COWS
Eunice Lim's quirky cow mural, titled Cattleland and located right next to the Little India MRT station's Exit E, is a convenient

starting point. While the cows were painted by the artist, members of the public chipped in to help paint the little rosettes.

ST PHOTOS
SHINTARO TAY



2. BLOOMING WALL
Head round the corner and down Kerbau Road. On the far end of the row of shophouses occupied by Park 22 Hotel is a striking work by Singapore artist Speak Cryptic.

A baroque bouquet of flowers, done in his signature black-and-white style, blooms across the entire wall. The work, titled In The Clouds, is inspired by flowers and patterns found on saris. See if you can spot marigolds and jasmynes among other blooms.



3. ABSTRACT MEETS SURREAL
Further along Kerbau Road, next to the colourful two-storey conservation shophouse known as the former House of Tan Teng Niah,

is a work by Singapore artist Zero. Abstract renditions of triangular incense cones surround one of his signature motifs: a surreal image of hands with eyes.

Artworks in Little India



STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS



4. OH, HELLO
On the way to No. 4, take note of the cute art decorating the pillars and walls of eatery Village Curry, at the corner of Kerbau Road, and a mural of old-school trades behind this kopitiam.

Head for 84 Serangoon Road. This is another mural by Lim. It is inspired by the location. Siyamala Bookstore, a 30-year-old bookshop. Do as the mural exhorts and say "Nalla" to the owner: It means hello.



8. IN GOOD COMPANY
Across from the Daily Delivery mural, tucked into an alleyway is a colourful mural by Izzad Radzali Shah titled Festival.

In this Fauvism-meets-Lat collage, which spans the length of the alley, there are vignettes of people and animals.



5. LET'S DANCE
Across from the bookshop mural is a striking series of Indian dancers painted by Colombia-born Belgium-based artist Didier Jaba Mathieu, who has left his mark

on quite a few buildings in Singapore. The dancers are from the classical dance traditions of Bharatanatyam, Odissi, Kathakali and Odissi.



9. SEE THE STAR
Walk further down Baboo Lane and you will reach an outdoor carpark. There is a huge portrait of well-loved Tamil action star

Rajinikanth by Zero here. The work is a tad faded as it was created in 2016, but it still makes for a striking Instagram shot.



6. GO FOR GOLD
Tucked into the alleyway behind the dancers series is an early work by Singapore artist Priyageetha Dia, who went viral for her golden staircase work in 2017.

The gold theme recurs in this piece, titled Loops Of The Precious, with its circular motifs recalling the celebratory rangoli patterns drawn outside households to celebrate festive occasions.



7. SPEEDY DELIVERIES
Head down Serangoon Road to Baboo Lane for the next cluster of works. Along one shophouse wall is Daily Delivery, a dramatically

Dutch-angled work by Mathieu. Take a closer look at the tiffin delivery vehicle and you will see it is actually powered by rockets.



10. GRAND FINALE
Head back in the direction of Serangoon Road, but cut over to Desker Road for the last pitstop. This mural by Shah Rizzal, titled

Layers, is an appropriate recap of Little India. Spot the classic arch entryway to the old Mustafa in the clutter of buildings in this piece.