

SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM



Client:

National Heritage Board

Architect:

Public Works Department

Engineer:

Public Works Department

Contractor:

Kimly Construction Pte Ltd

1996 AWARD

Founded by French priest Father Jean-Marie Beurel in 1852, the old St Joseph's Institution along Bras Basah Road served as a Catholic boys' school until 1987. Funding was approved in December 1992 to convert it into the Singapore Art Museum. This change of use allows the character of the building to be retained as an educational institution, maintaining the delicate balance between preserving significant parts of the school and meeting the functional needs of the museum.

A gazetted national monument since 14 February 1992, the former school site, in the heart of the Art and Heritage Precinct, consisted of six buildings built over a period of time: the Central Building (1855), Chapel Building (1912), Anderson Building (1907), Brothers' Quarters (1938), Badminton Hall and Toilet Block. The three earlier buildings were designed in the classical style and harmonised with one another. The Brother's Quarters, Badminton Hall and Toilet Block which did not respect the context defined by the earlier buildings were demolished and new buildings added to complement and harmonise with the earlier buildings, yet bearing a distinct contemporary touch. For example, the new Queen Street Wing resembles the Anderson Wing in terms of massing, form and height, but is not a mirror



Restoration of a monumental treasure of classical architecture

image of the older building. Incongruous additions eg modern staircases constructed in the 1950s which marred the beauty of the Anderson Wing exterior were also removed.

The policy of maximum retention was practised. Roof tiles were taken down one by one, examined, cleaned and re-installed. About 20% of the tiles were found damaged, and new replacement ones were grouped together and installed

on one part of the elevation, thus retaining the patina of the roof.

Where original elements were discovered during the restoration process, these were preserved. Examples are the pediment at the second storey front porch, the marble plaques and the entablature with an inscription supported by a pair of columns on pedestals.

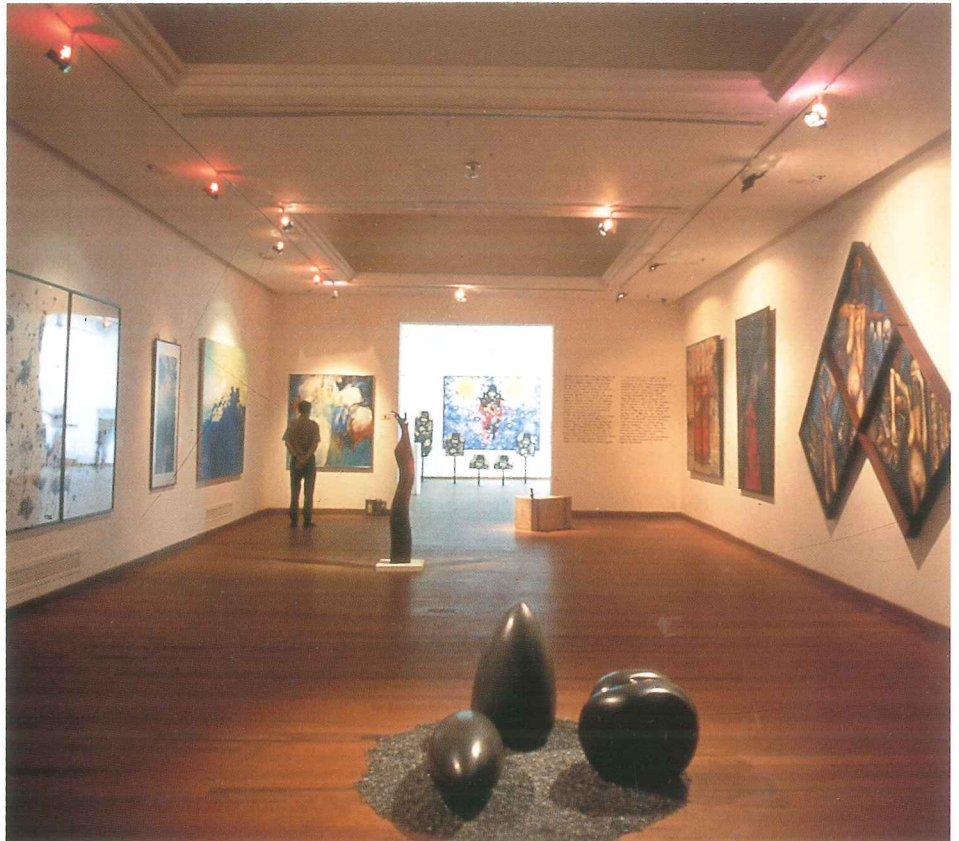
The stained glass window, at the end wall of the former Chapel, which was lost during the Second World War and the window opening subsequently bricked up, was restored and replaced with a new stained glass of contemporary art used to fill the Gothic window opening. Modern additions such as the large frameless glass panels were introduced to allow air-conditioning of the corridors and the retention of the building's original architectural expression.



Restored Corinthian columns and their plaster works kept intact by using detached sheet glass, thereby retaining the spatial quality and character of the colonnaded passageway



Original end wall of SJI Chapel "discovered" during restoration and subsequently preserved



A secondary wall of lightweight panel provides continuous hanging space for paintings whilst retaining the original outer wall with door openings



Service pipes and air-conditioning ducts properly concealed behind roof parapet walls



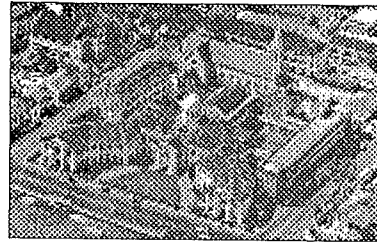
Old concrete tiles (foreground) carefully preserved



Fine cementitious grout injected to re-bond delaminated plaster on Corinthian columns to preserve the craftsmanship of 1903

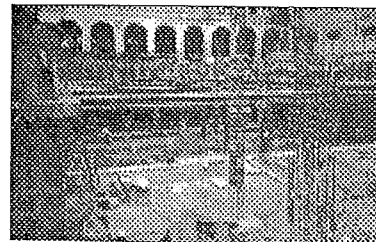
From School to Museum: The Singapore Art Museum at the old SJI

The Singapore Art Museum (SAM) occupies the site of the old Saint Joseph's Institution (SJI) within the heart of the Arts and Heritage Precinct. The Catholic boys' school was founded in 1852 by a French priest, Father Jean-Marie Beurel. In 1987, when the last of the SJI students left for their new school in Malcolm Road, it was announced that the old SJI would be converted into additional exhibition space to supplement the National Museum Art Gallery at Stamford Road.



An aerial view of SJI in 1962.

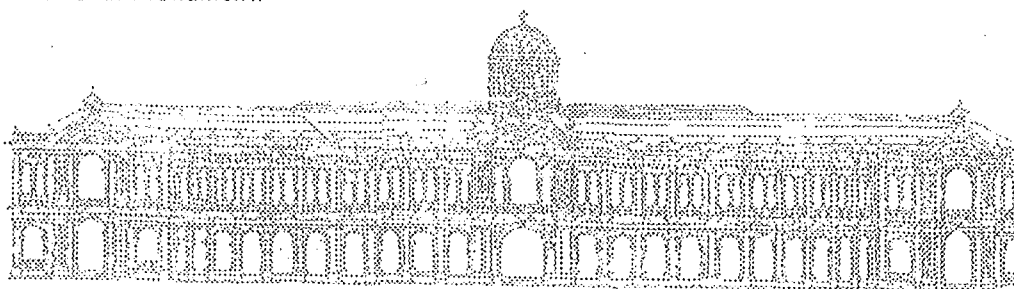
By 1989, a growing interest in heritage and the arts had led to the recommendation that the National Museum of Singapore be expanded into five specialised museums. From merely providing exhibition space, the old SJI was to be converted into an art museum.



Construction of the basement in progress. The basement is built to house storage facilities of the museum.

In 1992, following a further review of the museum development plans, it was decided that this museum would be developed to international standards. Its collection scope was widened to encompass the modern and contemporary art practices of Singapore's Southeast Asian neighbours. The museum facilities would include the installation of state-of-the-art climate controls in the galleries and repository areas.

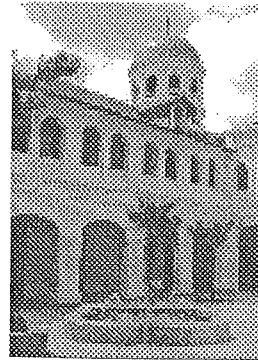
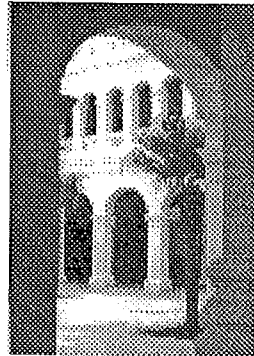
In the same year, the old SJI was gazetted a National Monument.



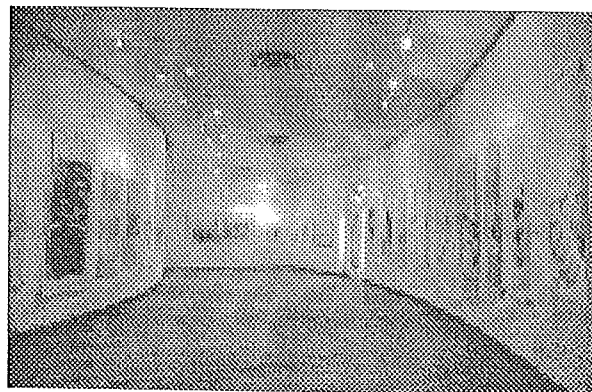
On 1 August 1993, the National Museum, which encompasses the Singapore Art Museum came under the administration of the newly-established National Heritage Board. The National Museum Art Gallery was re-named the Singapore Art Museum in anticipation of its move to the old SJI.

Conservation of the monument by the Public Works Department for its new use started in mid-1994 with Wong Hooe Wai as the architect. Because the buildings that make up the old SJI were built over a period or time (from 1855 till the 1950's), the process raised interesting conservation issues. The project was completed in October 1995. Much of the original character of the historic buildings has been recaptured despite modern intervention.

Today, the beautifully restored building is home to Singapore's national art gallery which is a museum of modern and contemporary art of Southeast Asia. Once again, the building serves an educational purpose, providing the setting for the Singapore Art Museum to support the National Heritage Board's mission of promoting an appreciation of visual arts and of our heritage.



The courtyards of the Singapore Art Museum.



One of the curved galleries in the Singapore Art Museum.

The Central Building

The oldest part of this building, the rectangular core, dates back to 1855. It was originally topped by a belfry. In 1903, the belfry was replaced by a dome. In the same year, two curved wings, a front verandah and a front porch, all designed by the French priest Father

Charles-Benedict Nain

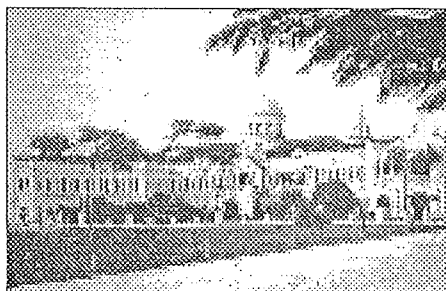
were also completed.

The Baroque gesture of the wings gave the building an unusual grandeur. It soon became a landmark.



Old SJJ with the belfry, 1870.

The porch then was only one storey high and the facade of the building had parapet walls on the roof and elaborate finials on the pediments. Its walls were painted salmon pink and the cornices light blue. The building was also enclosed by a low cast iron fence.



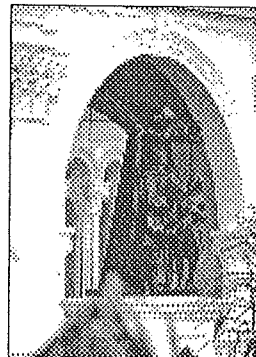
The Central Building before 1913.

The same building looked quite different as time went by. In 1913, a statue of St John Baptist de La Salle was installed above the porch. Subsequently, another storey was added to the porch. The roof parapet walls and finials were removed. The colour scheme was changed to cream. Even the boundary walls took on a different and bulky form.



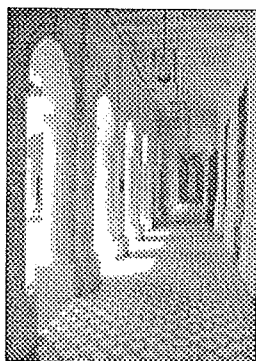
The Central Building after the War.

In carrying out the restoration of the Central Building, a conscious effort was made *not* to return it to its condition before 1913. To do so would have meant demolishing the second storey of the porch, known as The Foyer, and also the statue, thereby taking away historically significant parts of the building fabric.



The statue of St John Baptist de Le Salle is retained and conserved.

During the last days of the school, the building housed class rooms, a library, science laboratories and staff offices. Today, galleries with full climatic controls stand in their place. The boundary wall was also removed, allowing the Museum to integrate fully with its urban surroundings.



All the old doors and windows along this corridor are repaired and preserved.



The Central Building today.

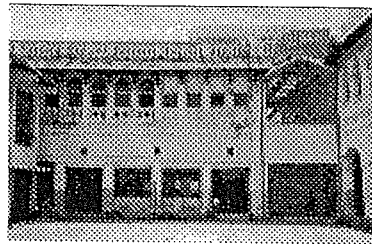
The Chapel Building

The building that now houses The Glass Hall and The Auditorium was completed in 1912. At that time, it accommodated a gymnasium on the lower storey and a chapel on the upper storey. Its elevations, made of a series of arches, were simple and elegant.

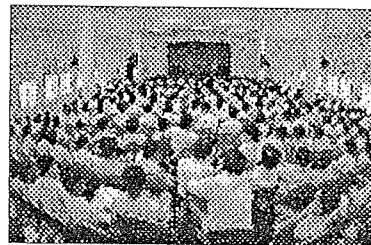


The Chapel Building before the War.

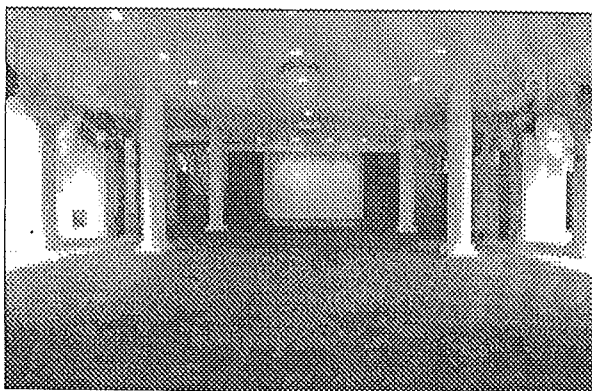
The gymnasium, originally named King George's Hall, underwent drastic changes after the War. The arches were filled up, louvered windows added, and low walls erected. Internal Doric columns were turned into cylindrical columns. A stage was also constructed. All these measures transformed the former gymnasium, into a school hall. Named the Oei Tiong Ham Hall in memory of his father by its benefactor, Mr Oei Tiong le, the Hall was declared open in 1952 to commemorate the centenary of SJI.



The Chapel Building in the 1950's.



Oei Tiong Ham Hall.



The Glass Hall.