

**Tell us about yourself.**

I'm an Australian artist with Hokkien and Peranakan heritage. After working in Japan, I relocated to Singapore six years ago in the hope of learning more about my father's background. It's been a rare chance for me and my family to connect to Singapore, and I've found many wonderful sources of inspiration for my artwork. My visual research into Peranakan culture has led to numerous opportunities to work with the Asian Civilisations Museum, National Library Board and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I've also been honoured to share my love of Peranakan culture as a volunteer guide at the Peranakan Museum.

**What is your favourite thing about Peranakan culture?**

It's the warm-heartedness of the Peranakans and their ability to mingle with others in Malay, Chinese dialects and English. Peranakans appear comfortable being who they are - people who are ambassadors for multicultural harmony and understanding.

And in their material culture, I love how Peranakans successfully fuse elements from multiple cultures in a beautiful harmony.

**How does being Peranakan influence your art practice?**

It's well-known in my family that my creative genes are from my father. In fact, my earliest memories are of my father cooking and doing craft projects with me. He was always very particular about how we dressed, and I later realised that his fastidious nature may have been influenced by his own Nyonya mother. In my artwork, I also tend to be quite detail-oriented. Learning about Peranakan culture has also made me realise that we are the sum of so many influences, and this has made me more comfortable in layering my own artwork with multiple meanings.

**What was it like working on the Singapore Heritage Tile collection?**

Like many newcomers to Singapore, I was amazed to see the lovely decorative tiles in many shophouses and colonial architecture around Singapore. I became even more excited when I realised that some of these tiles were made in Japan at the turn of the century. On a personal level, I was happy to find a link between my two favourite countries. As I began researching my family tree, I discovered similar tiles on my great-grandfather's shophouse on Club Street, my ancestral Hokkien clan temple, and on family

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# Jennifer Lim

Artist Interview



graves at Bukit Brown Cemetery. These discoveries inspired me to create the Singapore Heritage Tile Collection, which is a cultural tapestry of the 'old' and the 'new', with works such as 'Tropical Jalan', 'Kaki Lima Five Foot Way' and 'Three Stars'.

**How have you managed to keep close to your roots while growing up in Australia? Has that changed since you moved to Singapore?**

The main reason for my family's move to Singapore in 2012 was to learn more about my Singapore 'side'. Although my father brought me to visit his extended family every few years, I didn't feel a strong bond with his homeland. Another barrier was the fact that I didn't speak Malay or Hokkien. I grew up in an era in Australia where it was almost embarrassing if your parents were migrants. But since moving to Singapore, I've been able to experience various local customs and rituals thanks to friends and relatives, who have often invited me to join them. I've done extensive research into my family tree, and now feel much more comfortable about having Singaporean roots. I was delighted, for example, to participate in the recent Peranakan Genome Project in Singapore.

**Is there a figure you look up to in the Peranakan community?**

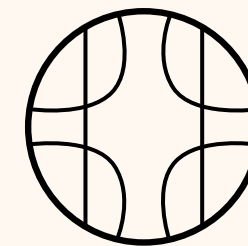
Because there are so many active and inspiring members of the Peranakan community, it's hard to name just one. Whether through writing, performance, or retail of Peranakan goods, it's wonderful to see their dedication and passion for the culture. I'm grateful to many in the Singapore Peranakan community for welcoming me.

**What is your advice to young artists of Peranakan heritage?**

I can only speak for myself, but to simply even call yourself Peranakan is a lovely way to acknowledge that some part of you comes from a unique culture that is in need of attention! Whether it be directly through artwork, or just simply through an understanding of Peranakan history, young artists can be inspired by the hybrid beauty of their roots. Since the Chinese Peranakans and others tend to be in the minority, even mentioning their heritage can only help to shine a light on this culture.

**One last question: What's your favourite Peranakan food?**

Prune kueh lapis! I like the European style of this delicate and decadent cake. Harum manis is also a favourite. My daughter prefers lapis sagu as she can playfully peel each layer off! And I definitely need my regular intake of ikan bilis goreng dengan kacang, which I have to now share with my 'localised' kids.



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