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Singapore's first toy museum

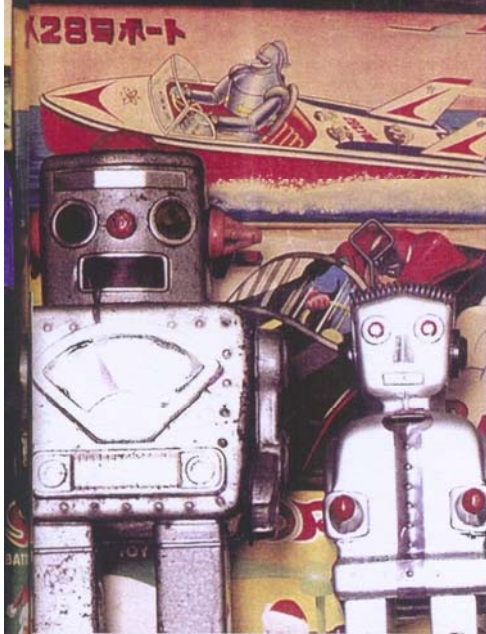




COLLECTING OLD TOYS IS A SERIOUS BUSINESS, AS MELISSA WANG DISCOVERS IN THE FINAL INSTALMENT OF OUR THREE-PART COLLECTING SPECIAL



BOYS' TOYS



■ HIS GUGGENHEIM

Singapore will soon be the first country in Asia outside of Japan to open a museum dedicated to vintage toys, thanks to a prominent 54-year-old collector of great humility, who calls the museum his "Guggenheim... and a realisation of my dream". However, preferring to keep a low profile, he declines to have his name made known to the public.

Called the Museum of Toys, the five-storey building, slated to open in January 2005, will exhibit only 20 percent of the collection belonging to the aforementioned mystery collector, whose earliest toys are from the mid-nineteenth century and range from dolls to tin-plate toys, teddy bears and golliwogs. The building is presently being designed and built by architect Chan Soo Khian, of SCDA Architects.

"There are many reasons for me to open a museum and I think one of them is because I've reached a stage in the collection where I'd like to share it with the public," he says. "One of the very important aspects of the idea for me is to bring happiness to people. Not just to educate but to bring a certain amount of enjoyment to their lives, because when someone looks at a toy, it evokes certain memories and snapshots of their childhood. In fact, one of the slogans for the museum is that it is dedicated to the child in every one of us," he adds.

To this collector, it's important to bring back this nostalgia: To allow people to reflect on their past, on a stage in their lives

when they probably had the least worries.

This museum will also be an attempt to educate the public, both adults and children, on the history of society and demonstrate that toys serve as more than just playthings for children. "A toy goes beyond its superficial significance," he says. There are many facets to these items – they are a window into society's modern history, and involve the manipulation of the thoughts of the masses.

He describes his collection as "one of the finest in Asia" and frankly admits that even he would not be able to afford to buy it today, were it for sale. "For many reasons it would be extremely difficult to put this collection together now," he says. "One of those reasons is the cost. Prices have increased so much I don't think anyone, in my opinion, would spend the kind of money needed to amass such a collection."

"Call it interest or foresight. I had the good fortune to get hold of many of these objects very cheaply, because 20 or 30 years ago people regarded these toys as items to get rid of. Now old toys are very scarce, and most of Singapore is cleared of them."

Fittingly, given his high regard for toys, the collector says he is motivated to fulfill his Guggenheim dream by a noble cause. "There is a social purpose behind the project," he says. "Once the museum is successful, I want to use some of the funds to help under-privileged children. This is my mission." ▶

