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Contributor/Singapore

Museum rekindles childhood imagination

“Working here is like fulfilling my destiny for me,” said Richard Tan, the curator of the recently opened Mint Museum of Toys in Singapore.

An toy lover and a former jewelry craftsman, he is now the keeper of a five-story museum displaying more than 5,000 antique and vintage toys, all more than 20 years old. Richard had owned a toy shop before. When a client offered him a job as the curator for an upcoming toy museum, it was an offer he couldn't refuse. No longer managing his own shop, Richard is now serving his life-long passion for toys as museum curator. He is assigned to manage a collection of some 50,000 toys of the owner, Chang Yang Fa, an electrical engineer and businessman. Richard led *The Jakarta Post* on a tour of the museum.

A long stretch of lenticular screens with comic characters from 1914 to the 1960s greet visitors at the first floor entrance. The ever popular Batman, Superman and Popeye & Olive are among the notable characters. The screens lead to a corner where a museum shop is planned.

The tour back into the childhood nostalgia starts on the second floor, the collectibles floor, displaying a pre-war toy collection up to the 1960s. Tin plate toys were popular mass produced toys in the early 1800s.

Then, many of the toys came from Germany where they were also known to set high standards in the indus-

try. Their sophisticated tin toys were exported to various countries including Japan. The imported German state-of-the-art toy trains and boats were certainly superior to the tin rattles made by local Japanese toy makers at that time.

However, with the arrival of tin plate printing machines and clockwork technology

from Germany, the Japanese tin plate industry surfaced and led the country to become a renowned tin toy manufacturer while Germany was struggling with the aftermath of World War I. Today, tin toys are certainly a much sought-after collectors' item and Chang Yang Fa has plenty.

From a set of climbing tin monkeys, race cars, boats and

figurines to a variety of lunch boxes, Richard enlightened the *Post* about the significance of these items. The various tin monkeys were manufactured in China, India, Germany, Japan and England; they all look identical except for the patterns printed on the tin. Copyright was not an issue back then and it was not known who the originator was or who the copy cat was.

Without stringent copyright regulations, a 1960s racing car could even have the logos of many giant oil companies next to each other; Esso, Caltex, Shell and Mobile, which is not permitted today.

Still on the same floor, Beatles fans can enjoy displays of the band's memorabilia. Among the Beatles' trays, rugs, marbles and wigs, the most impressive item would have to be an original autographed photo of the band that Yang Fa bought in an auction. With two of the band members already deceased, the photograph could easily have a five-digit value in dollars.

The third floor of the museum, the childhood favorite floor, is the doll exhibit collection. This section includes the Betty Boo doll which was banned in the 1930s due to its inappropriate attire (the lady's micro mini skirt was just ahead of her time, really), the personal teddy bear collection of Sue Pearson, author of *Encyclopedia of Teddy Bear Doll*, and a valuable Mickey Mouse doll with an original autograph of Walt Disney.

The exhibit features two momentous doll series from Michael Lee and Door of Hopes. Michael Lee was a well-known Chinese doll maker who migrated to Hong Kong from mainland China. All profit he made from the dolls was to help migrants from China. Michael presented Yang Fa with the first doll he ever made in 1946. He

dolls could be worth S\$10,000 a piece. Yang Fa owns around 150 such dolls.

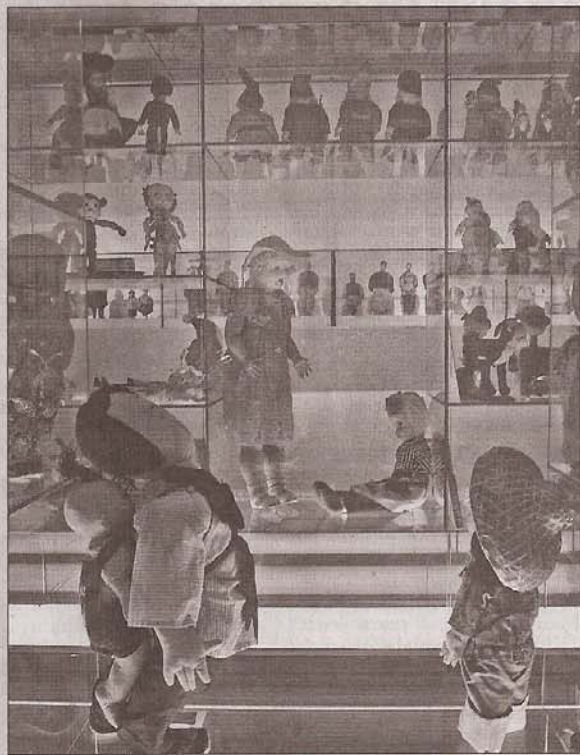
The toy museum dedicates its fourth floor to more recent heroic characters of Batman and Robin, Superman, Tintin, Popeye, James Bond, Green Hornet and a pool of Japanese heroes such as Astroboy and his sister-Uran, Ultraman and Gargantor. *The Post*

he explained.

Visitors can view outer space heroes on the top floor of the museum. The room exhibits a 1940s collection of Buck Rogers and his British counterpart, Dan Dare, Star Trek and Flash Gordon. The advance of the Japanese toy industry was shown in the museum's collection of early 1950s robots. They were the first to use batteries for movement, whereas others used it only for light function, and developed the technology for remote-controlled toys. The Japanese had an advanced imagination as well. About a decade before man landed on the moon, the Japanese toy maker created a moon-boat, complete with a driver wearing an outer space helmet.

According to Richard, the word Mint in the museum's name also stands for Moment of Imagination and Nostalgia with Toys. You can occasionally hear visitors saying “when daddy was small...”, “they don't make this anymore today” or “I used to have one of those” while browsing through the museum.

If you are in town and are tired of shopping, visit the toy museum and rekindle your childhood imagination. It's amazing what you can learn from these toys.



Doll display

courtesy Mint Museum of Toys



Courtesy Mint Museum of Toys

Museum entrance

passed away in 1996 at the age of 92. As for Door of Hopes, this was the name of a 1900 Western missionary group in China which aimed to protect young Chinese girls from prostitution and slavery. To fund their mission, they trained the girls as doll makers and sold the products to the affluent Chinese market. The dolls have very delicate features and some are adorned with detailed silk embroidered dresses. These

was informed that one of the 1960s Batman figures in a mint condition had an estimated value of S\$14,000.

To protect its valuables, the Mint Museum of Toys has installed surveillance cameras and a specially designed lock system attached to the ceiling. The latter was built in such a way that it can only be reached by someone with long and slim fingers like Richard's. Which is why I feel working here is my destiny,

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Tel: (65) 63390660
www.emint.com
Open: 9.30-6.30pm
Admission: Adult S\$10
Child (2 to 12 years): S\$5
Family package promotional rate available