Artefacts from one of S'pore's largest archaeological sites on display at Bras Basah MRT station

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Members of the public at Bras Basah MRT station viewing the display of artefacts from 700 years ago on Nov 19. The showcase, part of a three-part initiative titled Unearthing Stories Of Us, will last for six months. The artefacts are from the 2015 excavation at Empress Place. PHOTOS: LIANHE ZAOBAO

Ceramics traded from China and South-east Asia were used by settlers in ancient Temasek 700 years ago. Today, fragments of them are among about 200 archaeological artefacts on display at Bras Basah MRT station.

This is the first time archaeological artefacts dug up in Singapore have been displayed at an MRT station. Commuters can also touch and feel the fragments at a hands-on section.

Organised by SMRT Trains and the National Heritage Board (NHB), the display features a variety of ceramic fragments, from blue-and-white creations bearing what are believed to resemble Sanskrit motifs to celadons – ceramic pottery that originated in China.

The display is part of a three-part initiative launched on Nov 19, titled Unearthing Stories Of Us. It will be on display for six months at Bras Basah MRT station, with NHB and SMRT exploring the possibility of taking the display to other stations.

The launch event was attended by Mr Baey Yam Keng, who is Minister of State for Transport, and Culture, Community and Youth.

The artefacts on display are from the 2015 excavation at Empress Place – one of Singapore's largest excavation sites. The variety of items brought in from China and South-east Asia indicates that the island was a lively transshipment area with a bustling historical trade network 700 years ago.

Mr Yeo Kirk Siang, group director of policy and community at NHB, said: "All these artefacts tell a story of life back then, that our history did not just start from 1819 but actually traces back long before that."

He added that Bras Basah MRT station was chosen as the location for the archaeological display because of its proximity to the excavation site, the Civic District and museums.

Mr Yeo hopes the display can be a teaser for commuters to learn about archaeology and inspire them to visit the museums to learn more about the topic.

Commuters can also enjoy six vibrant works of art depicting Singapore's transformation from independence to the metropolis it is today.

The works of art were co-created by 60 seniors from Goodlife Studio, which are active ageing centres run by Montfort Care, with the help of watercolour artist volunteer Goh Ying Ying.

Ms Sabapathy Antoinette Ann, 70, one of the seniors, helped to paint an artwork depicting Tiong Bahru public housing built by the Singapore Improvement Trust (SIT), a colonial-era government organisation that preceded HDB. Known as SIT flats, they were characterised as being low-rise blocks.

The painting struck a chord with Ms Sabapathy, a part-time nursing lecturer at Curtin Singapore, as it reminded her of how public housing has changed over the years.

As a child, she lived in houses in low-lying areas that were prone to flooding. She recalled that the mattress on the floor that she slept on would float whenever it flooded.



On display are a variety of ceramic fragments, including blue-and-white creations bearing what are believed to resemble Sanskrit motifs.

She later moved to a high-rise one-room rental flat at Holland Close with her mother and four siblings, where flooding was no longer an issue. All her family members were subsequently able to live in bigger flats.

"(I wanted to share) the story of how my family progressed from one room to now everybody having their own flat, living comfortably," she said. "What (founding prime minister) Lee Kuan Yew started really came to fruition."

Commuters can listen to the life stories of Ms Sabapathy and other seniors by scanning a QR code at the exhibition.

SMRT is also collaborating with non-profit organisation Honour Singapore and five polytechnics to present 60 short films that highlight the stories of unsung heroes in Singapore. They are showcased on a TV display located adjacent to the artwork.

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