



# Untold Stories

*Four Singapore Artists' Quest for Inspiration in Bali 1952*

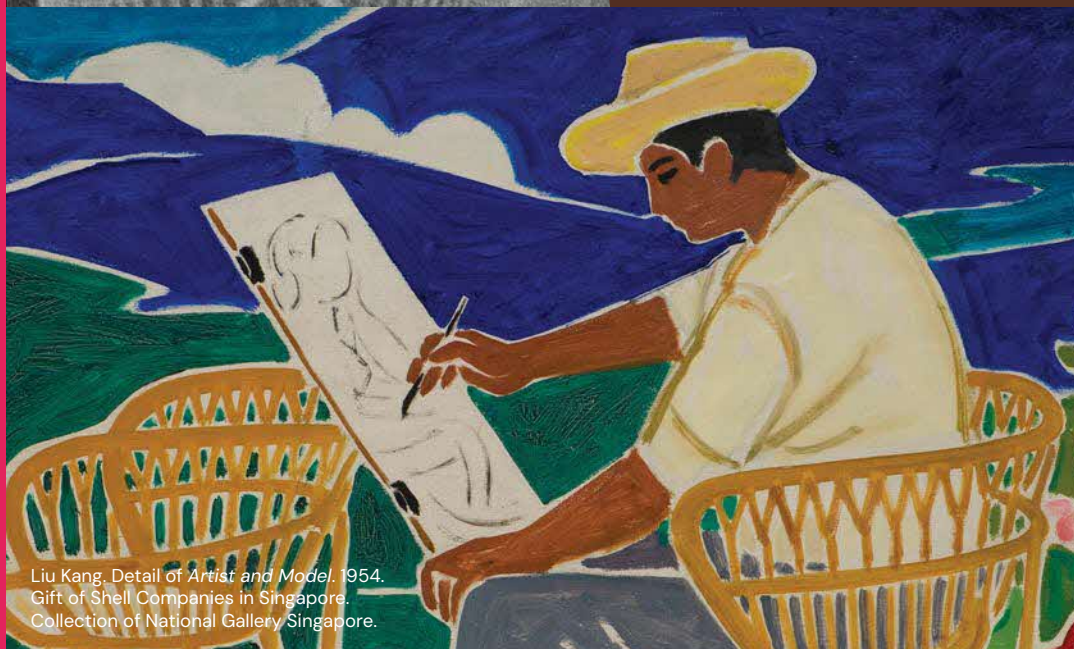
Collection of Liu Kang Family

## ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Discover the remarkable journey of four Singapore artists —Liu Kang, Chen Chong Swee, Chen Wen Hsi, and Cheong Soo Pieng— who travelled to Bali and Java in 1952 in search of new artistic perspectives.

*Untold Stories* brings to life the seven-week adventure that culminated in their iconic 1953 exhibition and left an enduring legacy in Singapore's art history. See how they captured the essence of local life in works that continue to inspire today.

*This exhibition includes mature content. Visitor discretion is advised.*



Liu Kang, Detail of *Artist and Model*, 1954.  
Gift of Shell Companies in Singapore.  
Collection of National Gallery Singapore.



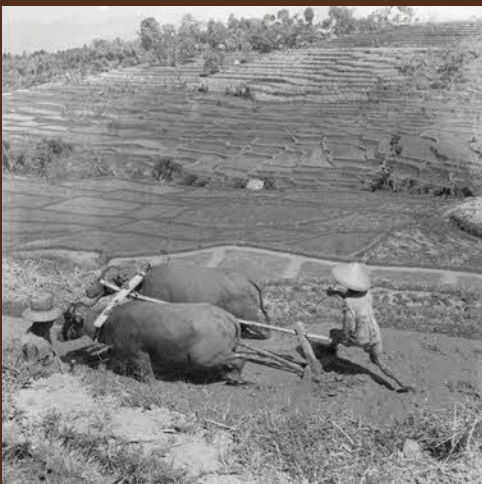
(From left) Liu Kang, Chen Chong Swee, Cheong Soo Pieng and Chen Wen Hsi at Kallang Airport on 8 June 1952 before their flight to Jakarta.

14 Feb – 3 Aug 2025

Gallery, Level 10,  
National Library Building



Scan here for details  
[go.gov.sg/untoldstories](https://go.gov.sg/untoldstories)



TOURS

Curator's Tours

Thursdays

27 Feb, 27 Mar, 24 Apr,  
29 May, 26 Jun & 24 Jul 2025

7 pm – 8 pm

Public Tours  
(Led by docents)

Saturdays

8, 15, 22 & 29 Mar 2025

5, 12, 19 & 26 Apr 2025

3, 10, 17, 24 & 31 May 2025

14, 21 & 28 Jun 2025

5, 12, 19 & 26 Jul 2025

2 Aug 2025

Conducted in English:

10 am – 11 am

Conducted in Chinese:

3 pm – 4 pm

Meeting Point

Gallery, Level 10,  
National Library Building

A. Scene at Tretes, Surabaya,  
that inspired Liu Kang's  
*Artist and Model* (1954).

B. Famed legong dancer, Ni Pollok,  
performs for a crowd.

C. Buffaloes pull a scraper along  
a narrow rice terrace.

PROGRAMMES

Meet the Author: Gretchen Liu  
*Bali 1952: Through the Lens of  
Liu Kang—Forgotten Photographs:  
Untold Stories*

Mon, 3 Mar 2025

7 pm – 8 pm

The Pod, Level 16,

National Library Building

Author Gretchen Liu takes you behind the scenes and shares the story of how *Bali 1952: Through the Lens of Liu Kang* came together—from finding the forgotten photographs to delving into archival and other sources to make sense of it all.



Curators' Talk: The Making of *Untold Stories*

By Gretchen Liu, Nadia Ramli & Goh Yu Mei

Wed, 18 Jun 2025

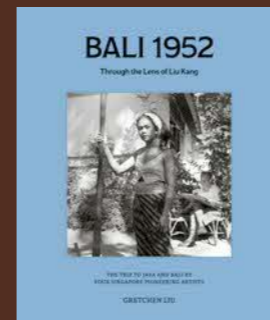
7 pm – 8 pm

Possibility Room, Level 5,

National Library Building

Ever wondered what goes on in the making of an exhibition? Go behind the scenes with our curators and uncover the creative journey behind the *Untold Stories* exhibition, from concept to creation.

Admission to programmes and tours is free.  
To register or for full programme listing,  
visit [go.gov.sg/untoldstories-progs](https://go.gov.sg/untoldstories-progs)



SATELLITE  
EXHIBITION

Behind Every Painting

Four Singapore artists journeyed to Bali and Java in 1952, in search of new expressions for their art. Explore the stories and inspirations behind their paintings.

Lobby, Level 1, National Library Building  
14 Feb – 3 Aug 2025

ROVING  
EXHIBITION

Painting the Everyday

From bustling markets to feathered friends, discover how four Singapore artists transformed everyday experiences into vibrant masterpieces as inspired by their 1952 trip to Bali and Java.

Tampines Regional Library

14 Feb – 6 Apr 2025

Woodlands Regional Library

7 Apr – 1 Jun 2025

Jurong Regional Library

2 Jun – 20 Jul 2025

GETTING TO  
THE NATIONAL  
LIBRARY  
BUILDING

Opening Hours

Monday – Sunday:

10.00 am to 9.00 pm

Closed on Public Holidays

Address

100 Victoria Street  
Singapore 188064



An exhibition by

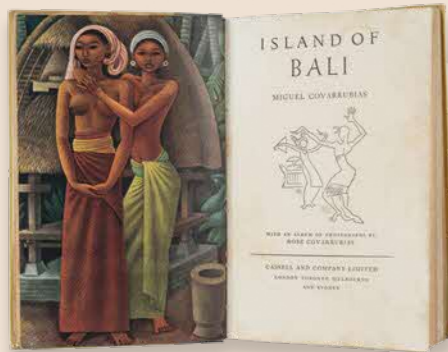


All information is correct at the time of printing (February 2025). The National Library Singapore reserves the right to make changes to the programmes without prior notice.



## Chapter 1 Imagining Bali

In the early 20th century, Bali's image as a paradise was shaped by colonial promotion and the rise of pleasure travel. Artists, photographers, writers and scholars further popularised this image. Explore Bali's romanticised image in historic footage, early publications, and art.



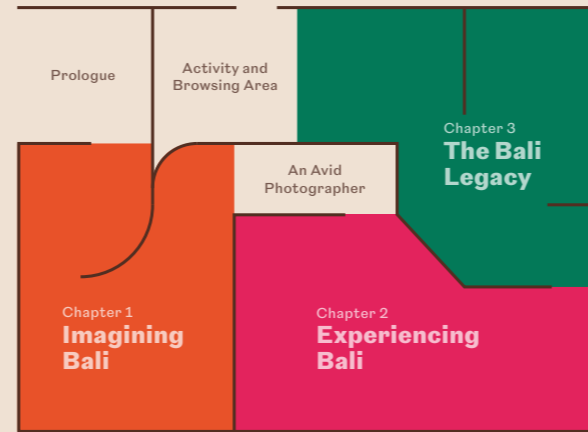
*Island of Bali*, first published in 1937, remains a definitive text on Bali for non-natives. It contains extensive details and is illustrated with Covarrubias' art and photos by his wife, Rosa.

***Island of Bali***  
Miguel Covarrubias (1904–1957)  
London: Cassell, 1937  
Liu Kang Collection,  
National Library Singapore

Tourism in the Dutch East Indies grew with the creation of the Tourist Traffic Association and the rise of pleasure travel. The colonial government promoted Bali to Western travellers, highlighting its landscapes, culture, and people.

### ***Travel through the Mystic Isles of Java, Sumatra and Bali***

Orient Touring Company  
Place of publication unknown:  
Orient Touring Company, c. 1926



## Chapter 2 Experiencing Bali

The artists' journey through Bali and Java was marked by serendipity and kindness from strangers and friends. Liu Kang captured more than 1,000 photographs during this iconic trip. Immerse yourself in an interactive projection of over 300 photos and experience the journey through the artist's lens.



The artists observed everyday life in Bali and Java, which later inspired their artworks.

All photographs of the 1952 trip to Bali and Java featured are from the Collection of Liu Kang Family unless otherwise stated. Photographs by Liu Kang © Liu Kang Family.

## Chapter 3 The Bali Legacy

In 1953, the four artists held a joint exhibition, featuring works developed from their travel sketches in Bali and Java. This landmark event in Singapore's art history later inspired similar ventures by other artists. Discover the artworks created from their 1952 quest for inspiration.

***Bali Temple***  
Chen Chong Swee  
c. 1952  
Oil on canvas,  
72 × 61 cm  
Gift of the artist's family  
Collection of  
National Gallery  
Singapore  
© Family of  
Chen Chong Swee



***Souri (titled Dance in the catalogue of the Bali exhibition)***  
Liu Kang  
1953  
Oil on canvas,  
120 × 70 cm  
Gift of the artist's family  
Collection of  
National Gallery  
Singapore



**[Not titled] (Idyllic Landscape, Bali)**  
Cheong Soo Pieng  
1952  
Watercolour on paper,  
58 × 35.2 cm  
Collection of  
National Gallery  
Singapore



***The Ferry***  
Chen Wen Hsi  
c. 1952  
Oil on canvas,  
112.6 × 85.2 cm  
Collection of  
National Gallery  
Singapore