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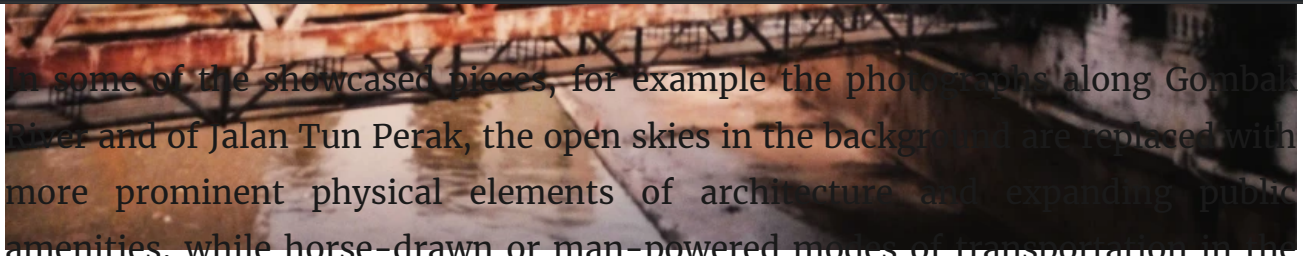
Taking the Mystery out of History

Kuala Lumpur – Masa Berlalu

by Bahiah Ismail

It is truly amazing to see how far the country has come since the days of Merdeka/ Independence, with Kuala Lumpur paving the way at the forefront of the transformation. In what is considered to be a relatively short period of just 60 years, continuous innovations and developments have changed much of this ever-lively city, yet the thriving local culture can still be found preserved in the many familiar nooks of the city in which they were first created. All these are spectacularly captured through the many vibrant photos at the exhibition, cleverly composed to compare the KL of yesteryear with the KL of today.





In some of the showcased pieces, for example the photographs along Gombak River and of Jalan Tun Perak, the open skies in the background are replaced with more prominent physical elements of architecture and expanding public amenities, while horse-drawn or man-powered modes of transportation in the foreground are replaced with modern motorized vehicles, with home-made Proton and Perodua cars (both unabashedly mentioned here with a hint of national pride) cruising alongside their imported counterparts. Other pieces, such as shots of Petaling Street, show that some of the activities there have remained and have grown, indicating that they continue to be a strong element of the community. Another beautiful aspect to note is that many historical buildings have been preserved as focal points of the city, as clearly seen in some the photographs of the present.

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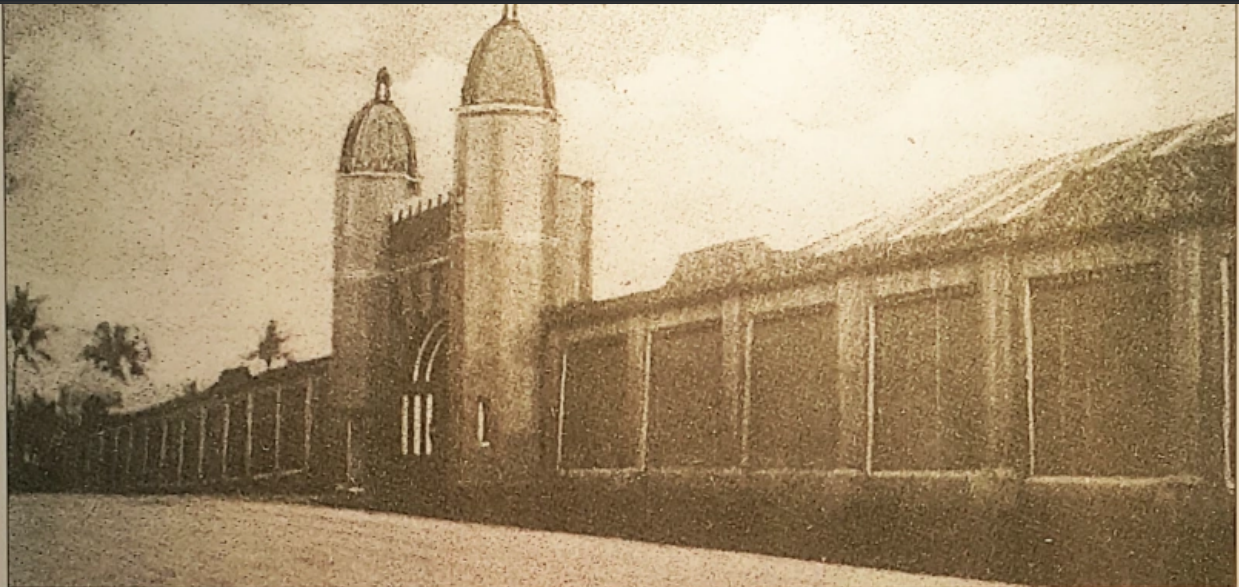
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Central Market at Jalan Hang Kasturi started as a wet market

On the other hand, there are also pieces that bring some contrast to the above, such as the one of the Pudu Jail, captured in its previous entirety in an old sepia photograph and showcased against a current shot of its now solitary front gate, which was decidedly conserved from the demolition works making way for a new development there, resembling a still-dutiful guardsman defiantly standing at attention facing the oncoming busy traffic. The image is somewhat reminiscent of the Porta de Santiago of the A' Famosa Fort in Melaka; perhaps, as the saying goes, just another example of history repeating itself: both gates are the only saved remnant of their respectively intimidating walled-structure of the past, although the major difference here being that the former was meant to keep people in whereas the latter to keep people out.



Pudu Prison at Jalan Hang Tuah. Today, only the main gate and a small part of the exterior wall remains.

Lastly, just to mention so as not to be missed, is a wall-sized, intricately detailed, hand-drawn, pencil-sketched birds-eye-view of the streets of KL, quietly standing near the back of the exhibition. Do stop a while to “walk” through this map and discover the various social characters and cultural focal points which can be found in real life around KL.

From majestic old photographs capturing the grandeur and heritage of Malaysia’s history in black & white and hues of sepia, to the colourful and inviting snapshots portraying the unique melting pot of culture that has become the celebrated identity of Malaysia today, this temporary exhibition is definitely worth a catch while it’s here, to add a spice of flavour to the tour of the museum.



Map of Jalan Petaling, Jalan Sultan and adjacent streets, drawn by Gan Sze Hooi



Author: Museum Volunteers, JMM

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Museum Volunteers, JMM / March 22, 2017 / Special Exhibitions

2 thoughts on “Kuala Lumpur – Masa Berlalu”



Eunice Peik Lin Moss

April 1, 2017 at 1:38 pm

Thank you, Bahiah. It has made me determined to go earlier when I next guide so I can do it justice!



Bahiah Ismail

April 1, 2017 at 6:08 pm

That's great, Ms.Eunice! You'll love the vintage photos of KL, definitely a good chance to get that rare glimpse into the past, just to see how amazingly different it all used to be. Do venture to step in and have a closer look at them too, there's some hidden beauty in the details!

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