

S'porean artist turns Raffles' statue into grill, gives alternative take on viewing history & Raffles

A different way of looking at Raffles.

By [Tanya Ong](#) | March 1, 2018



In the lead up to the Bicentennial in 2019, many are reflecting upon Singapore's complex history and the role of key historical figures.

Singaporean artist, Jimmy Ong, does just that through his artworks.



Photo courtesy of Jimmy Ong.

In two different artworks, Ong re-fashions replicas of the Sir Stamford Raffles statue.

By portraying a less-than-rosy, and even grotesque image of the man, this provokes the audience to rethink Raffles' intentions and behaviour as a colonial master.

Statue shows contrast

Why the statue of Sir Stamford Raffles, you ask?

Typically, after colonies gain independence, colonial statues are torn down. In Singapore, however, the reverse happens.

Currently, there are two statues of Sir Stamford Raffles in Singapore – One at Empress Place, and the other by the river at the landing site.

Raffles is seen gazing out with a resolute stance and an air of confidence, suggesting that he is a highly regarded figure in Singapore's history.



Photo from Visit Singapore.

In contrast, Ong's artworks serve to mock the stance of the statue and provide different perspectives of Raffles as a colonial master.

Here's a look at some of them.

Fabric statues, cut & sewn

A well-known piece of work by Ong is "Seamstresses' Raffleses."

The artwork consists of fabric patchwork sculptures made by the artist as well as Javanese seamstresses.

These are what some of them look like:



Photo courtesy of Jimmy Ong & FOST Gallery.



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The process of making these sculptures – cutting, sewing, stuffing – are all forms of violence enacted as a form of vengeance against Raffles.

A different story in Java

This piece, which is made with the help of Javanese seamstresses, is significant because it refers to Raffles' reputation as a villain in Java.

Before the Netherlands regained responsibility of the East Indies, Raffles looted the Javanese courts and exiled a Surakarta prince in 1812.

In Singapore however, Raffles' reputation is vastly different.

As a founder of a trading port, Raffles is seen to have set the stage for the development of modern Singapore.

As a grill for love letters

In another piece of work called "Open Love Letters," a replica of the statue is sliced into half and made into a charcoal grill.



Photo courtesy of Jimmy Ong.

One side is used as a grill to roast kueh kapit or love letters, and the other side serves as a cooling rack for food which can be enjoyed by the viewers.

Ong's artworks are featured in the OH! Emerald Hill Art walk taking place throughout March 2018. [Find out more about the event here.](#)

Top photos courtesy of Jimmy Ong.