

Singapore's First UNESCO World Heritage Site

A Garden for All

Reflection. Inspiration. Solace.



Wong Sher Maine

Nicholas Leong

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Garden
for All

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Reflection. Inspiration. Solace.

With a history that dates back to 1859, the Singapore Botanic Gardens is the first tropical botanic garden in the world to be honoured as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Located right in the middle of the city, the beloved Singaporean landmark is a green sanctuary that we have always enjoyed. But it was with the onset of the pandemic in 2020, when travel was curtailed, that we truly renewed our love for the Botanic Gardens and its wonders. During our frequent, long walks, we discovered flowers, plants, trees and healing spaces, all of which brought us much-needed peace and serenity. It became clear to us that in its history of

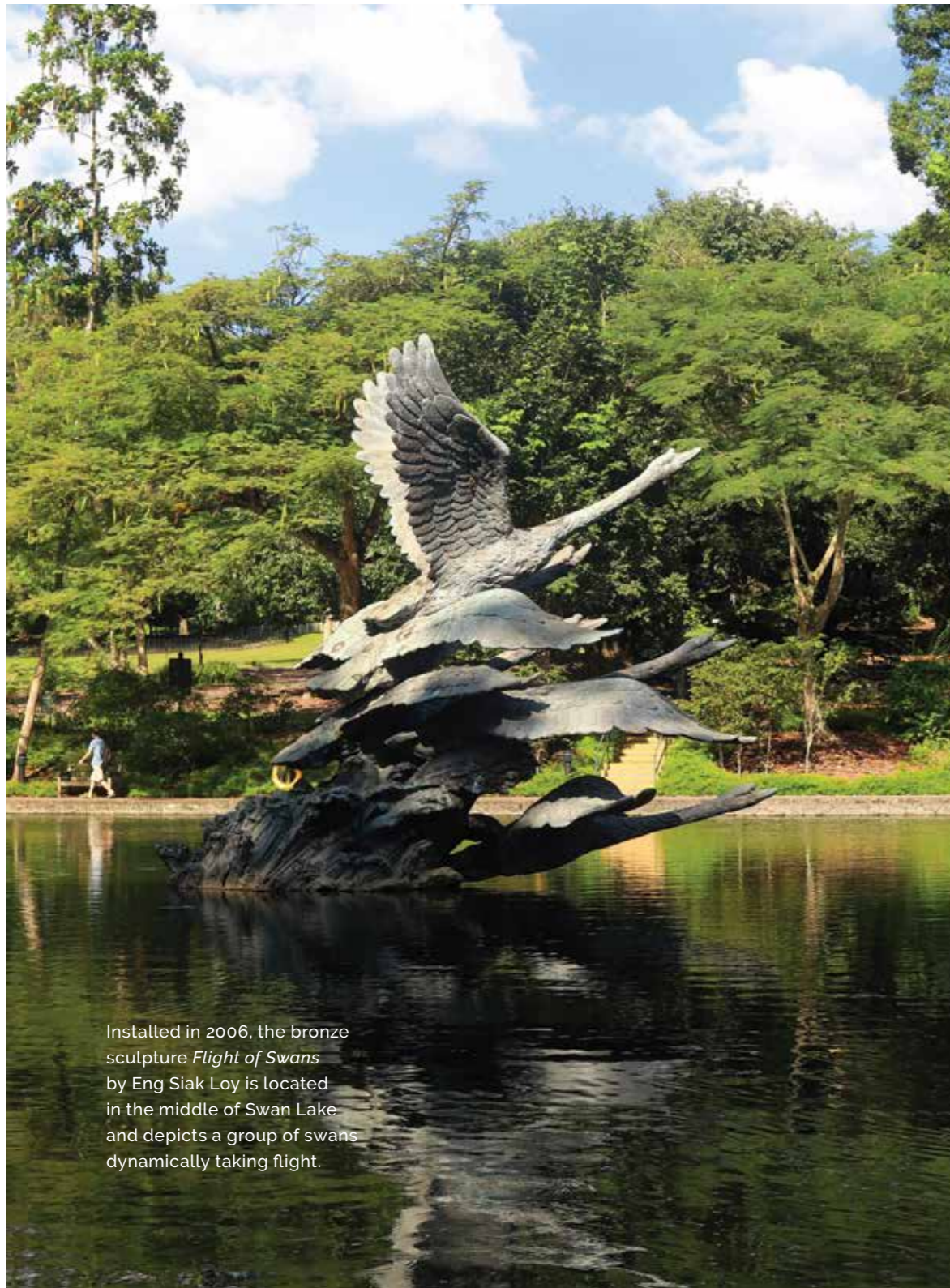
164 years, the Gardens has evolved into a place of reflection, inspiration and solace for generations of people in Singapore. We thus decided to sponsor the production of this wonderful keepsake you now hold in your hands.

This book opens the window to a new perspective, with an intimate look at what the Gardens means to different groups of people. We hope that you will be inspired to renew your love for the Singapore Botanic Gardens and look at it in a whole new light.

Putera & Katie Sampoerna
Putera Sampoerna Foundation



Twinwood, Texas, Christmas 2021.



Installed in 2006, the bronze sculpture *Flight of Swans* by Eng Siak Loy is located in the middle of Swan Lake and depicts a group of swans dynamically taking flight.

For Art Lovers

From the whimsical to the grandiose, the Singapore Botanic Gardens features a treasure trove of sculptures that are a delight for art lovers. Built with materials like bronze, steel, stone and wire to withstand the elements, these sculptures not only provide aesthetic pleasure as they blend seamlessly into the greenery but they also offer a glimpse into Singapore's history and diverse cultural heritage.



Lady on a Hammock, a bronze sculpture by British sculptor Sydney Harpley, was commissioned by Singapore's first Chief Minister David Marshall. This is one of three sculptures that Mr Marshall donated. It was presented to the Gardens for its 130th anniversary in 1989.

Amid the lush greenery of the Gardens, many would be familiar with three distinctive sculptures of similar style: a girl on a swing, a girl on a bicycle and a lady on a hammock. All three sculptures capture a sense of unbridled joy, movement and freedom as the breeze gently stirs up the leaves around them. These art forms are by the British sculptor Sydney Harpley and were donated to the Gardens by Singapore's first Chief Minister David Marshall in 1984, 1987 and 1989.

There is a story here. In an interview with *The Straits Times* in 1989, Mr Marshall explained that the Gardens had a special place in his heart. He would go there as a child with his family for "picnics in the shady nook", adding that they had "tea and ice cream from the little tea kiosk that used to be there".¹

The kiosk is no longer standing. But with these special memories, it is little wonder that he gave back to the Gardens. Jean Marshall, David Marshall's wife, commented that her husband had donated the three Harpley sculptures "in the hope that they would lift the hearts of Singaporeans passing by and make them smile".²

Indeed, these sculptures have added to the joyous experience of visiting the Gardens. They are among the many generous donations from individuals, communities and corporations, each one with a story—you need only take the time to read the information plaques. For example, *Chopin*, which features Frédéric Chopin playing the piano as a female listener gazes upon him, was a gift from the Polish Embassy in 2008 to mark the bicentenary of the classical music composer's birth.

In the Gardens' vast spaces, the sculptures are not always easy to spot. Nevertheless, they are thoughtfully scattered to complement each area, and encountering one is always a delightful surprise. For instance, while walking around Swan Lake, you will see *Flight of Swans*, which depicts swans about to take flight; they appear in stark contrast to real swans that are gracefully gliding across the quiet waters. Continuing around the lake, you will stumble across a space where mothers enjoy time with their children; they are welcomed by a heartwarming sculpture of a mother swinging her child called *Swing Me Mama*.

While some sculptures add to the aesthetic experience of the Gardens, others offer a glimpse into Singapore's diverse cultural heritage. *Chang Kuda*, by local self-taught artist and Cultural Medallion recipient Chong Fah Cheong, for example, features a childhood game popular in the 1950s and 1960s in which children would have fun by simply sitting on each other's backs. Chong told *The Straits Times* in 2011 that the sculpture depicted the carefree childhood days of the past. He explained, "This was a time without TV, computers and cellphones. When I was growing up, as soon as school was over, you headed outdoors. The games we played were simple yet fun."³ This piece, like many others in the Gardens, strikes an emotional chord.

Aptly named *Swing Me Mama*, this springstone sculpture by Dominic Benhura depicts a child being swung by her mother and is reminiscent of the artist's own memories of his family.



Located near the Tanglin gate and designed by Eng Siak Loy is the large *Koi Pond Mural*. It was crafted by 20 Balinese stone workers. The mural paints an enchanting picture of the wide variety of plants and animals in our region, including the sealing wax palm, the symbol of the Botanic Gardens.



Joy shows a mother lovingly gazing at her child as she swings the child up in the air. The bronze sculpture by Ruth Bloch, which came from an anonymous donor, perfectly captures the emotions of motherhood and family.

Donated in 1987 by Singapore's first Chief Minister David Marshall, *Girl on a Bicycle* by Sydney Harpley captures the carefree spirit of the joys of playing outdoors.



Based on the wings of the seeds of the dipterocarp tree, *Fifty Wings* by American artist James Surls was installed in 2015, the year of Singapore's 50th birthday. The bronze and stainless-steel sculpture was donated by Dr Helmut and Anna Sohmen.



Sculpted by British sculptor Antony Gormley, *Contract* was a gift from Hotel Properties Limited in remembrance of their late chairman, Mr Joseph Grimberg, a distinguished lawyer and former Supreme Court judge.

The first sculpture of three to be donated by Singapore's Chief Minister David Marshall. *Girl on a Swing* by Sydney Harpley was modelled after a local Malay factory production operator, Sapiah Hussein. The figure is shown swinging in mid-air, full of unbridled joy and freedom.

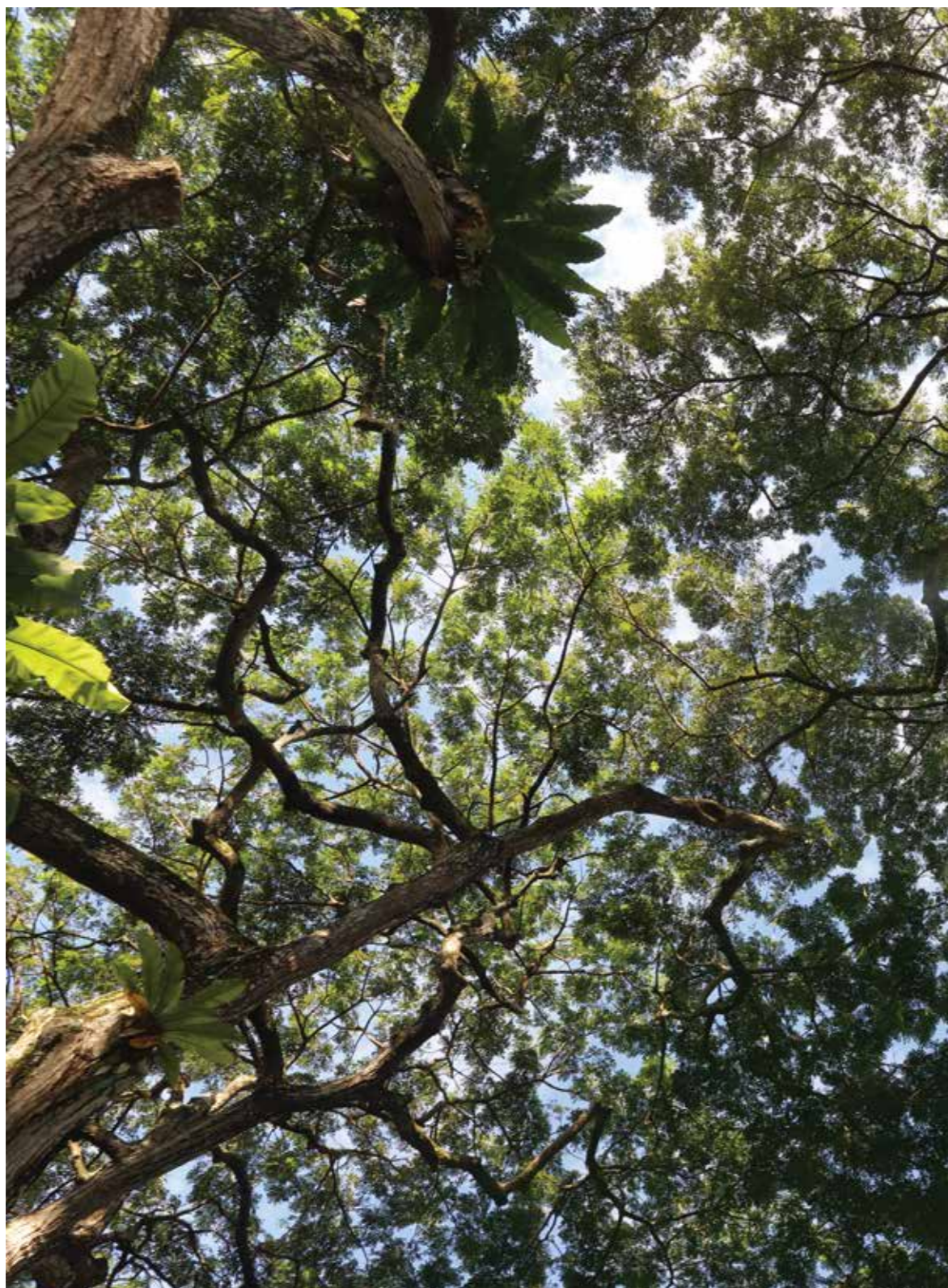




A quaint piece called *Geese* sits at the corner of Swan Lake with geese basking in the sun. It was installed in 1995.



Chang Kuda depicts six boys playing a childhood game that was popular in the 1950s and 1960s. In Malay, "chang" means to carry, and "kuda" means horse. It was sculpted by local artist and Cultural Medallion recipient Chong Fah Cheong.



Biographies

About Wong Sher Maine

Wong Sher Maine is a former *Straits Times* journalist and mother of three. In her career as an independent writer for nearly two decades, she has written over ten books on topics ranging from business to parenting. When not penning down her thoughts, she creates music on the violin and piano.

About Nicholas Leong

Nicholas Leong is a commercial photographer with an extensive background in editorial, advertising, corporate, industrial and hotel photography. He has worked for clients on all continents, with the exception of Antarctica. He is also the founder of a professional cycling team in Kenya.





When the COVID-19 pandemic forced Singaporeans to stay home, many rediscovered the allure of the Singapore Botanic Gardens.

Besides its appeal as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the 164-year-old sanctuary found new converts among folks as diverse as art lovers, history buffs, fitness fans, birdwatchers and shutterbugs. The Gardens has become a popular destination for all, individuals and families, residents and visitors.

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