

INTRODUCTION

In an initiative to physically brand the George Town UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Penang State Government opened an international pitch for “Marking George Town – An Idea Competition for a UNESCO World Heritage Site” in 2009. The winning idea culminated in a unique series of steel-rod caricatures which retells the history of the streets and stories of its communities in a local voice.

Sculpture at Work with the creative direction of local artist Tang Mun Kian won the commission with the theme “Voices of the People”, a deserving retelling of Penang history by Penang characters with their own peculiar brand of wit and humour; in effect, marking and relating stories

of key heritage sites of the city in a unique and timeless way.

In 2010, work started and to date, there are 52 steel-rod sculptures. This unprecedented project also opened the door for new public art forms in Penang. Among the more popular are wall murals by Ernest Zacharevic for Mirrors George Town and wall murals by visiting foreign artists invited by Urban Xchange. The Marking George Town project has inadvertently changed the landscape of George Town through art and created a whole new category of attractions.

These pieces, like most public art, were not officially named; hence they are titled here according to subject matter or as they are popularly known.



1 Spy

THE ARTISTS



Lefty

Lefty is a comic-book creator and the co-founder of Gilamon Studio where he gave life to the popular Major Zombie and Jimi Germ series. He also once dealt in dark themes and black humour in the wholly-Southeast Asian, Eisner-nominated Liquid City graphic novels.



Baba Chuah

Baba Chuah made his debut in the cartoon scene in 1991 when his work first published in Falsafah Batu Api. This led to the cult anthology series Fantasi. Some of his most elaborate work to date was for Dark Horse Comics and the Eisner-nominated Liquid City.



Reggie Lee

Known for his mischievous characters, Reggie Lee's cartoon style and humour is the most recognisable in Malaysia next to Datuk Lat's. He has become a household name after decades as a syndicated cartoonist for the largest Malaysian daily, The Star. His work is also seen on billboards, commercials and animated films.

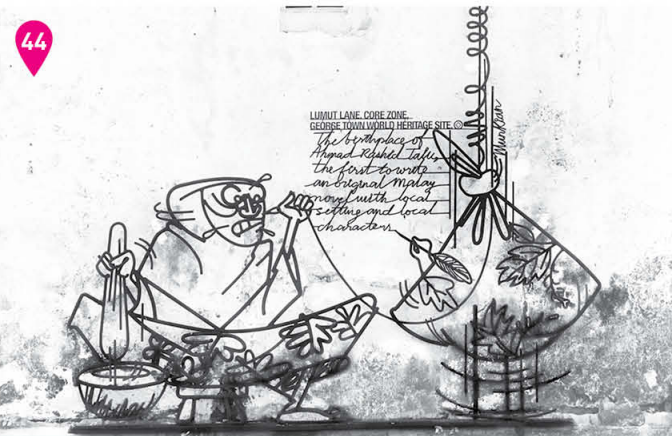


Tang Mun Kian

A graduate of the renown Malaysian Institute of Art, Tang Mun Kian is first an artist, as well as an established art director and designer. Typically unassuming and low profile, it is often his work that speaks volumes.

HAVE YOU SEEN THIS ONE?

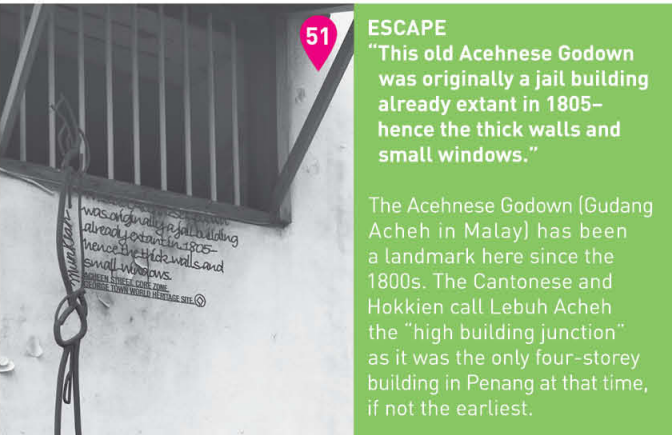
Explore off the main tourist routes and you'll find some of the best pieces. Hidden at the end of Lumut Lane and gracing a simple house is a clever piece by artist Tang Mun Kian introducing Ahmad Rashid Talu, the first to write an original Malay novel based on the local setting and characters. Here, the famous author is depicted as a baby writing from his cradle.



BORN NOVELIST

In 1927, Ahmad Rashid Talu wrote Kawan Benar or “true friend”, the first novel using Malay characters in the local setting of Penang. His second novel lakah Salmah? is revered for its protagonist Salmah, a Malay woman of progressive thinking in colonial times.

Another economically-simple steel-rod sculpture depicts an escape from the window of a warehouse building that was once a prison on Lebuah Aceh. One should also look out for the steel-rod sculpture at an actual rattan-making shop on Chulia Street - to tell its story, this piece uses real rattan whips as part of the sculpture!



ESCAPE
“This old Acehese Godown was originally a jail building already extant in 1805—hence the thick walls and small windows.”

The Acehese Godown (Gudang Aceh in Malay) has been a landmark here since the 1800s. The Cantonese and Hokkien call Lebuah Aceh the “high building junction” as it was the only four-storey building in Penang at that time, if not the earliest.

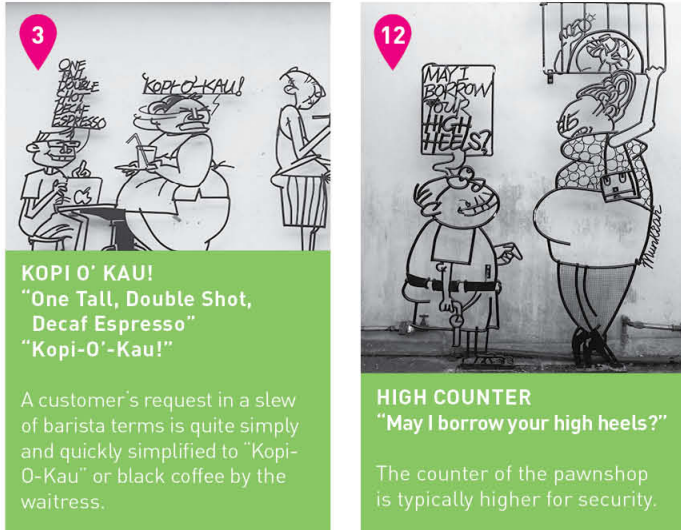


ROTAN
“Thick, Medium or Thin?”

The rattan whip or Rotan used to be the “light but memorable” punishment for children. At an actual rattan shop on Chulia Street, a mother teases his boy with a choice of thick, medium or thin whips before even looking at his school report card, but the boy has already fled into the bushes. Can you spot him?

Certainly, there are some pieces which can make you laugh even after seeing them countless times. Located at the side wall of an actual pawnshop on Chulia Street, a steel-rod sculpture tells the story of a short man at a high counter of a pawnshop.

Another hilariously straight-faced piece sits above a local coffeeshop at the corner of Kimberley Street and Penang Road. It celebrates the amazingly simple, straight-up way of communicating that Penangites are known for. Marking George Town sculptures are unique in its local-accented wit and humour.



KOPI O' KAU!
“One Tall, Double Shot, Decaf Espresso”
“Kopi-O'-Kau!”

A customer's request in a slew of barista terms is quite simply and quickly simplified to “Kopi-O-Kau” or black coffee by the waitress.



HIGH COUNTER
“May I borrow your high heels?”
The counter of the pawnshop is typically higher for security.

LIGHT UP YOUR EVENINGS

For a little entertainment after dinner, try exploring the Marking George Town sculptures to indulge in some local wit and humour, or simply to take photos.

The Marking George Town steel-rod sculptures are purposefully-lit for night-time photo-taking. And because they are located at key areas, the Marking George Town sculptures also become your location markers when exploring the city. If you choose to start from the Pier, you

might also want to stop by the Esplanade for a walk along the waterfront. In the vicinity, prominent British-era buildings such as the Courthouse and the St. George's Church are lit up in full splendour.

The nights are more cooling at around 26°C with an occasional strong breeze coming in from the sea and road traffic slows down after 8pm, making it perfect for walkabouts.



2 Mahjong



20 Beca

LEGEND HAS IT THAT...

Early astrologers from South India used green parakeets to foretell the future, according to a steel-rod sculpture in Little India. Another piece tells us how the paper oblation business on Lebuah Carnarvon thrived on the Chinese belief that all pleasures of the material world, even bungalows and cars, could be sent to the hereafter by reproducing them in paper and burning them.

The Marking George Town sculptures not only tell stories of the place, they introduce the traditions, beliefs, practices and industries at key areas of the heritage city.



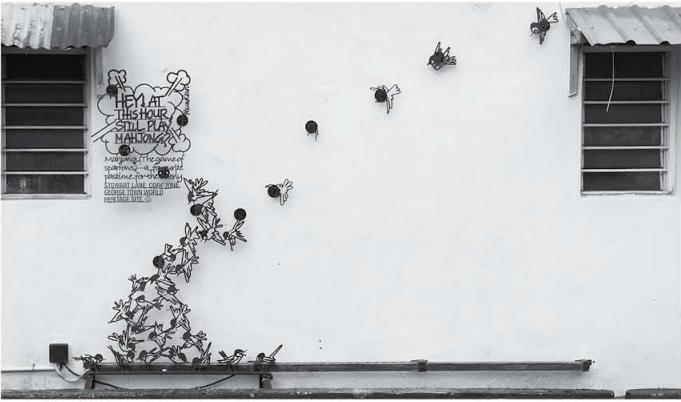
39 Untrained Parakeet



30 “Yeoh” Only



9 Mr Five Foot Way



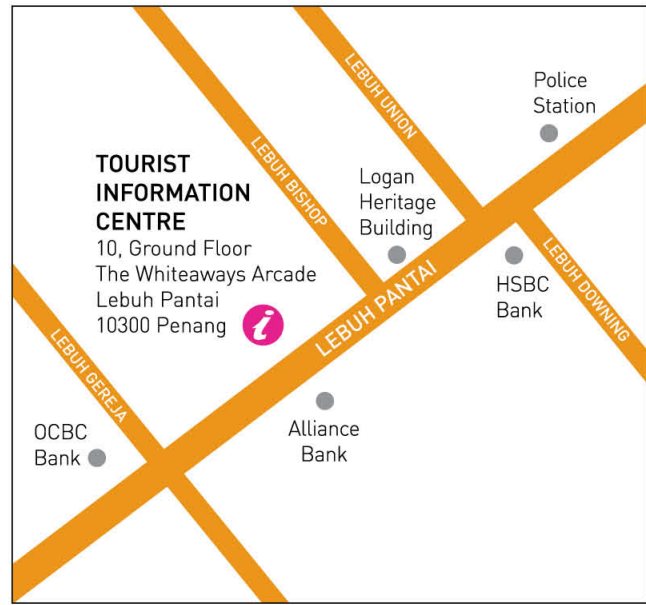
43 Limousine

HISTORY, HERITAGE, HUMOUR

To fully understand and appreciate each piece, it is important to read the accompanying descriptors - they briefly explain the history of the place and the people who worked and lived there. The Marking George Town sculptures carry the theme “Voices of the People”, and is meant to retell the history of each part of George Town in the way that the locals would; with their own peculiar brand of wit, humour and language.

A steel-rod sculpture at Transfer Road, for example, uses the word “Goh Ka Ki”, the local Hokkien-

Malay term for the five-foot ways of Penang. Another piece called “Mahjong” at Stewart Lane has neighbours shout in local English accent “Hey! At this hour, still play Mahjong?” in response to the noisy shuffling of Mahjong tiles; Mahjong being the favourite pastime in this mainly Cantonese quarter. It is also no coincidence that the artists who created these pieces are local Malaysians and Penangites. All these makes Marking George Town a fun and interesting way to discover the local heritage.



The Tourist Information Centre in George Town handles enquiries, provides brochures and directional maps as well as highlights the latest events and happenings in Penang.

TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRE

Monday-Friday
9.00am to 5.00pm

Saturdays
9.00am to 3.00pm

Sundays & Certain Public Holidays
9.00am to 1.00pm

Web : mypenang.gov.my
Facebook : Penang Global Tourism
Instagram : penang.experience
Twitter : PenangXperience
TikTok : experiencepenang
Email : info@penangglobaltourism.com
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All event information is correct at time of print and is subject to changes without prior notice.

