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## PASSING THE TORCH

Earlier this year, we said goodbye to our wonderful Project Curator Li-Xuan Teo. Li-Xuan joined the programme in 2022 coming from a background in history of design and material culture. Her research interests lie in the study of fashion and textiles, especially as they intersect with race, colonialism, and presentations of the human body. From the moment she set foot in the department her smile and dedication radiated throughout the programme!



[Li-Xuan Teo at the EMKP 5-year anniversary conference.](#)  
(Image: Paula Granados Garcia)

She worked daily with all the grantees, developing great relationships and a deep understanding of the different material practices and communities involved. As she said: *"what I enjoyed the most about EMKP was learning about all the different projects and getting to know each one of the grantees. It gave me a chance to learn about the communities they worked with"*.

During her last weeks with us, Li-Xuan was able to ensure the handover of all her tips and tricks to our new curator, **[Chrisyl Wong-Hang-Sun](#)**, something for which we are extremely grateful. Chrisyl is a Mauritian and Chagossian anthropologist who has been working with the Chagossian diaspora in Mauritius and the UK. Her regional interests are in the ethnography of the Indian Ocean, particularly the Chagos and Mascarene Islands.

As sad as this transition has been, we look forward to seeing Li-Xuan blossom in all her future endeavours, and we are delighted to have Chrisyl as part of the team. Thank you, Li-Xuan, and welcome Chrisyl!

## EXPLORING PHOTOGRAMMETRY

In February 2024, the EMKP team and 10 EMKP grantees attended a workshop hosted by the Digital Skills Network in Arts and Humanities, at the University of Brighton. Led by Dr Karina Rodríguez and her team, the workshop focused on the potential of 3D modelling to record and digitally preserve material culture.

During three days of sessions, we learned and tested the different tools and skills needed to create 3D models using photogrammetry. As an accessible alternative to 3D scanning, photogrammetry allows the generation of 3D models from several pictures of the same object taken from different points of view, a method that has proven to be very useful in the documentation of artefacts and material culture in the field. 3D models allow the production of high-quality visualisations of objects, offering a better understanding of the object's materiality, since the models can be moved and rotated in space, and allowing higher quality zoom-in than other imaging methods.

EMKP grantees brought artefacts from their research and experimented with different cameras, lights and set ups. It was wonderful to see our grantees applying the skills they had learned to create new 3D models and we are really looking forward to seeing how these translate into new records coming onto the EMKP repository. To learn more about the workshop and test out these skills yourself, visit the open access module [here](#).



[Freda Nkirote M'Mbogori adjusting the angle of her artefact brought from her fieldwork in Kenya and Ethiopia.](#)  
(Image: Paula Granados Garcia)

## RECORD NUMBER OF APPLICATIONS

This year the programme has received the highest number of applications in one grant round. We are very happy to see how our dissemination has borne fruit, generating new interest, connections, and friends across the world. However, this is also a stark reminder of how urgent and important this work is, and the speed and scale of change that threatens material practices across the world.

We are conscious that this year the competition will be even higher than in previous years and although we will not be able to fund them all, we very much appreciate the effort that all applicants have made, and their commitment to documenting the rich variety of material practices. We are also very grateful to our panel and external reviewers who play a vital role in the granting process.

On this point, we are delighted to announce the appointment of a new expert, Dr. Mark Nesbitt, who will be joining the [EMKP panel](#) this year. Mark is the Senior Research Leader for Interdisciplinary Research, and Curator of the Economic Botany Collection at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

Drawing on Kew's collections, he works with communities in the Brazilian Amazon, India, and Aotearoa. He is a past-president of the Society for Ethnobotany, current president of the British Society for the History of Pharmacy, and an honorary professor in the Department of Geography, Royal Holloway, University of London. Mark has a particular interest in materials such as basketry, paper, textiles, and dyes, and in medicinal plants. Welcome, Mark!



[Mark Nesbitt, EMKP panel member](#)

# SIGNS OF NOSTALGIA IN HO CHI MINH CITY

## Rachel Tough

In the 1960s and 1970s, hand-painted advertising signs were widespread in Ho Chi Minh City, named Saigon until 1976. Even the 'Vietnam War' did not destroy all such signage. However, major infrastructure projects, rapid population growth, and a continued push for economic development mean material aspects of the city's heritage such as its iconic hand-painted signs are now being lost. Amidst all this change is an ongoing nostalgia boom. Retro-themed cafes, markets, vehicles, and fashion as well as antique-hunting are increasingly popular with urbanites drawn to notions of an idealised past.



Hand-painted coffee shop sign in Thu Duc district reads 'Rich with the flavour of the past'.

(Image: Hoang Nguyen Le Thai)

As well as yearning for a past time, city residents yearn for past spaces. At one such space – the jasmine garden 'nostalgia café' in district 12 - Phạm Thanh Thôi interviewed local sign-painter Hoàng Đức Thuyền and his recent customer, café owner Trần Quốc Quang. Sat in the café's patio surrounded by nostalgic objects including an old-fashioned pedal rickshaw (xe lô) and a motorised tuk tuk (xe lam), Quang reflected, "The old and rustic spirit of Saigon is attractive to today's city dwellers, and I see the use of these old signs as a form of cultural transmission (truyền văn hóa) for arts that risk fading into obscurity".

Renowned Ho Chi Minh City sign-painter Hoài Minh Phương passed away shortly before the project's start. His home studio in Tân Bình district is now shuttered. His passing serves as a poignant reminder of the ephemerality of material knowledge and of the importance of documenting it through initiatives like EMKP.



Artist Thuyền displays a sign that he found at an antiques store (Image: Rachel Tough)

Our project focuses on the new generation of sign-painters who combine modern tools like computer design software, social media, and spray painting with traditional making techniques to create and market classic signs to business owners in the contemporary city.

As the ongoing nostalgia boom shows, the new crop of in-demand artisans has successfully popularised and revitalised the craft of sign-painting - an important element of the city's heritage – attracting interest from across generations.

To learn more about Rachel Tough's project, *Documenting the knowledge, skills, and practices of the last remaining sign-painters in Ho Chi Minh City*, which is supported by Phạm Thanh Thôi (Co-Investigator), and Diana Lê, Quang Nguyễn, and Thanh Sơn Nguyễn (research assistants), visit the webpage [here](#).



Project Co-I Phạm Thanh Thôi from the University of Social Sciences and Humanities Ho Chi Minh City, in-demand sign painter Hoàng Đức Thuyền and his client Trần Quốc Quang at his 'Nostalgia Cafe' (Image: Thanh Sơn Nguyễn)

## UPLOAD: BATEK WEAVING PRACTICES, MALAYSIA

A new collection has just been uploaded to the **EMKP repository**! Alice Rudge and colleagues Ya? Dunay, Jamilah, Na? Bal?op, Na? Ban?on, Na? Pilih, Na? Batew and Labih have documented the harvesting, drying, dyeing, and weaving of pandanus palm, a traditional practice of the Batek people in Pahang State, Malaysia.

Batek are an indigenous population of Peninsular Malaysia, who dwell in lowland rainforests. Their livelihoods are centred on the hunting of forest meats, foraging for wild tubers, plants, and mushrooms, tourism work, and trade. In Pahang, though some of their rainforest is protected by Taman Negara (the national park that spans the three states in which Batek people dwell), much of their ancestral forest has been lost.



[Cutting pandanus strips to the same size](#)  
(Image: Alice Rudge).

Weaving is embedded in Batek forest knowledge; it plays an important role in the maintenance of the fruit season, as it encourages a good crop of fruits. Thus, weaving of the pandanus palm is a central part of everyday Batek material culture, and items woven are much loved – as are the activities of making them. Such practices tend to be a communal and an egalitarian activity, but as many children now attend boarding schools, spending most of their time away from the forest and their families, many weavers worry that their children will not learn how to weave, resulting in the loss of knowledge.



[Dying](#) (Image: Alice Rudge).

This documentation hopes to ensure that Batek can continue to access their knowledge from the EMKP open-access repository. The equipment used to conduct the ethnographic work was a Nikon D5600, a Rhode shotgun microphone, and an Acer Enduro laptop, which will be owned by families of Batek collaborators. Each collaborator has also been provided with an SD card containing the recordings and photos from the project in formats that are playable on their mobile phones.

Part of the project involved a collaboration with Gerimis Gallery, a Malaysian indigenous-focused art and archiving project, which resulted in a booklet containing photos and information from the project, which was disseminated widely among Batek communities.



[All the finished bags](#) (Image: Alice Rudge).

Contributions and suggestions for future issues should be sent to: [emkp@britishmuseum.org](mailto:emkp@britishmuseum.org)